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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Advising China, 1924-1948.
The Role of Military Culture in Foreign Advisory Missions

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Sean C. Ahern

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Executive Summary

Title: Advising China, 1924-1948: The Role of Military Culture in Foreign Advisory Missions

Author: Sean Ahern (Civilian)

Thesis: The Chinese Nationalist Army's military culture established an operational environment in which many officers valued political loyalty over military competency, quantity over quality, tradition over modernization, and endurance over preservation. That operational culture reduced the Nationalist Army's effectiveness and left foreign military advisers with few definite options to reform that army.

Discussion: From 1924 to 1948, Russia, Germany, and the United States sent hundreds of advisers and thousands of weapons, munitions, and other supplies to organize, train, and equip the Nationalist Army. Yet that army's combat effectiveness arguably did not improve. Weighing the concept of military culture against those advisory missions details why the Nationalists failed to build an effective army and why it collapsed in 1948 during the Chinese Communist takeover.

Conclusion: Examining the Nationalist Army's military culture provides some enduring lessons for present-day advisory missions:

- The size of a military and the quality of its arms mean little without a recruitment, education, and training system that builds an adaptive and innovative military culture—the “bedrock of military effectiveness.”¹
- Understanding the host-nation's military culture is more critical to the advisers' success than the types and numbers of weapons they bring with them.
- Advisers should “mind the gap,” which represents the delta between how they train the host-nation military and how it fights on the battlefield. Advisers should determine if a military's culture is interfering with its military effectiveness.
- Advisers should also avoid “training in the vacuum,” in which advisers train a military without addressing the political or economic problems within the host nation that affect its military culture.

Preface

As the United States withdraws its combat troops from Afghanistan, NATO and the US are likely to sustain some form of an advisory mission there beyond 2014. While the numbers of military advisers, weapons, and munitions sent to Afghanistan will serve as key inputs to that mission, this paper intends to explore another essential factor in shaping the success or failure of foreign advisory missions: the host nation's military culture. To explore the nexus between military culture and advisory missions, this paper will examine three such missions from 1924 to 1948 to the Kuomintang (the Chinese Nationalist Party). This paper does not intend to compare Nationalist China with Afghanistan today, but instead seeks to provide a point of departure for thinking about the role of military culture in foreign advisory missions.

I wish to acknowledge the support of my academic mentor, Dr. Pauletta Otis, in the process of writing this thesis. I also wish to extend my appreciation to the Modern Military Records Branch at National Archives II in College Park, Maryland and the Collections Directorate at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the two locations where I conducted the bulk of research for this paper. In addition, I am grateful to the Grey Research Center at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia.

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Introduction

Scholars have debated whether the 1949 Communist victory in China was “inevitable.”² As Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist regime was collapsing in 1948, some Nationalist leaders and US officials lobbied the Truman Administration and Congress to increase US military assistance for the Nationalist Army. They argued that without additional US advisers, weapons, and munitions, the Nationalist Army would be unable to defeat its Communist rivals. They declared that those who opposed sending aid to the Nationalist regime would be responsible for its defeat. After the Chinese Civil War, various scholars and US officials maintained that the failure to send supplemental aid to Chiang Kai-shek was one of the decisive factors in the Nationalist Army’s defeat.³

That thesis holds little merit because it overlooks the valuable and inherent concept of military culture, which represents the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of a military institution that are shaped by its traditions, practices, and leaders.⁴ This paper will argue that the Nationalist Army’s inherent culture stymied its combat proficiency, operational flexibility, and organizational learning capacity. In the final analysis, the Nationalist Army did not require additional US advisers or weapons; it required a fundamental transformation of its military culture. From its inception in the early 1920s, the Nationalist Army exhibited five defining cultural traits:

- **Political Command Philosophy.** The army’s rigid dependence on politically loyal officers left its command and staff positions swollen with militarily inept leaders. In battle, the Nationalist Army valued political obedience over military initiative, enabling numerically inferior enemies to dominate the fight.

- **Residual Warlordism.** The Nationalist regime's balance-of-power strategies to co-opt internal opponents and warlords into its military framework left army command structures divided and military strategy disjointed.⁵
- **Quantity over Quality.** Army officers valued quantitative over qualitative superiority, in which field commanders employed the concept of mass without decisive maneuver. That concept greatly increased battlefield casualties and military debacles.
- **Endurance over Preservation.** With a vast supply of peasant soldiers, the Nationalist Army expected its troops to endure in battle without sustainment or support services. Logistics, sanitation, and medical services were more or less afterthoughts in military planning.
- **Tradition over Modernization.** Army commanders accepted new military doctrine in principle but ignored it in practice. The Nationalist Army relied more on traditional strategies and tactics, but failed to adapt or adjust those methods to fit new operational environments.

This paper therefore sets out to explore the Nationalist Army's culture and does so by analyzing three specific resources that affect military culture: education, training, and recruitment. The centrality of Russian, German, and US military advisers to the Nationalist Army's development offers three distinct case studies to observe how the army's culture evolved over time and how it interacted with those advisory missions. Against that conceptual framework, the paper will present its findings in four main parts. Part one will analyze how the political and military environments in China during the late 1800s and early 1900s shaped the Nationalist Army's inception. Parts two through four

will examine Russian, German, and US military efforts to organize, train, and equip the Nationalist Army. The closing remarks will highlight the important links between military culture, foreign advisory missions, and military effectiveness.

Part One: The Warlord System

From 1916 to 1928, endemic violence and political chaos ripped through China in a period that many historians label the warlord era. A warlord derived his political legitimacy from the size of his army. A warlord's long-term survival in the system reflected his ability to use balance-of-power tactics and temporary alliances in order to hedge against his opponents. The warlords therefore valued quantitative superiority and political acumen more than building professional armies, which negatively affected military recruitment, education, and training in China. That dynamic triggered third order effects on officer quality and leadership, military strategy and tactics, and troop discipline and sustainment. While the Nationalist Army imposed higher standards than the average warlord army, its military culture nonetheless exhibited warlord features.⁶

i. The Setting: Dynasties and Revolutions

After the Japanese delivered a crushing military defeat to China during the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), some Qing Dynasty authorities declared that the country needed a modern army equipped with Western armaments. To develop that army, the Qing authorities employed the concept of "Self-Strengthening," which used "Western learning" for "practical development" while retaining the "essence" of Chinese traditions.⁷ That practical-essence synthesis (in Chinese, *ti-yong*) formed the basis of the Qing Dynasty's military reforms and reorganization.⁸

With German and Japanese assistance, Qing authorities restructured the regional armies into 36 divisions to form a national force, designated the New Army. By 1911, the New Army had counted 16 divisions and an equal number of mixed brigades, totaling less than 200,000 troops. Most of those troops originated from Yuan Shikai's northern Peiyang Army—the most elite force in China during that time. That left the New Army fragmented along traditional regional alliances, with the bulk of Qing forces fighting for Yuan Shikai and not for China's national defense.⁹

As the Qing Dynasty reformed its armies, revolutionary forces from southern China gained popular traction in their campaign to overthrow the ethnic-Manchu leaders who presided over the dynasty. Revolutionary leader Sun Yat-sen in the early 1900s began to unite disparate elements within Chinese society against the government, including soldiers who served in the New Army. Sun's revolution culminated in 1911 during the Wuchang Uprising, when various army garrisons, local towns, and regional leaders rebelled against the government. Most critically, Yuan Shikai chose to align his Peiyang Army temporarily with Sun's forces. Yuan's move together with the widespread disorder toppled the dynasty, giving rise to a new but volatile provisional Republic led by Yuan Shikai in north China. Political fissures quickly surfaced between Yuan's style of governance and that of Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party or the Kuomintang (KMT) in south China. The KMT's political ascendancy together with the splintering of the Peiyang Army after Yuan's death in 1916 ruptured the fragile system.¹⁰

ii. Recruitment: Soldiering in Warlord China

The warlord armies varied in size, ranging from major armies or military cliques that controlled regions, like the KMT in south China, to petty armies that controlled small

counties or districts. Most sources indicate that the total number of men fighting under the various Chinese armies more than doubled over a four-year period, increasing from about 500,000 men in 1916 to about 1.4 million men in 1920. Mixed among those armies were large numbers of militiamen, bandits, and irregular troops. The major armies from 1917 to 1928 engaged in eight large-scale conflicts, fighting the biggest wars in the late 1920s when the contenders mobilized anywhere from 450,000 to one million troops.¹¹

The warlords in an effort to augment their manpower imposed little or no physical and mental recruitment standards, which over time lowered the quality of officers and enlisted men. US Army General (then Major) John Magruder in an attaché report on enlisted recruitment wrote, “There are no age limits, weight limits, literacy requirements or investigations [...]. Practically the only physical requirements are superficially sound limbs and eyes.”¹² The most common method to collect soldiers was “street recruiting,” in which a commander or his representative would travel through towns and cities to entice wandering peasants.¹³ Other forms of recruitment hired bandits, militiamen, and former soldiers to augment standing units. US and Russian military reports from the 1920s indicate that a large percentage of the enlisted men were bandits. The numbers of militiamen or bandits sometimes rivaled or outnumbered those of regular army units, particularly in Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces.¹⁴

Those low standards combined with rural depression provided the Chinese militarists a vast supply of men. The agrarian crisis in the 1920s created a perception in the rural areas—where 80 percent of the population lived—that army life provided a better standard of living than the farm with its endless labor, unreliable wages, and poor sustenance. The army ostensibly provided a stable job and wage. Depression, local

feuding, and the growing number of armed groups in rural areas therefore drove residents toward commanders with whom they shared family or clan ties. Many of these rural areas became known as the “soldier-producing regions” (in Chinese, *zhan bing zhi qu*).¹⁵

As the agrarian depression sunk lower and peasants increasingly filled army ranks, a growing divide between China’s rural and urban populations emerged with the latter group showing contempt toward the former. Urban elites generally perceived the soldiers as mercenaries.¹⁶ That perception was not far from reality. A scholar on warlord China submits that the “soldiers went into battle in the hope of being rewarded by their commanders or allowed to loot.”¹⁷ Many of these “poverty-stricken” soldiers desired to stay in the army than return to the farm, and discharged soldiers usually found their way back into the armies. As Major Magruder noted, “there exists no system of retirement.”¹⁸

The recruitment system also affected military leadership, discipline, and troop preservation. Most army generals and officers maintained abusive relationships with their recruited soldiers, resulting in soldier maltreatment and general neglect. A Russian adviser in south China, for example, reported that most army generals viewed their troops as personal investments. A larger army covered more territory and therefore collected more taxes. Generals were less concerned about the quality or “upkeep” of their units and more focused on their size.¹⁹

Chinese officers also abused their power at the expense of the enlisted men. The army payment system, for example, allowed senior officers to siphon cash as it flowed down the ranks. A Russian adviser reported, “Everybody was stealing [...] from the commander of the army down to the company commander.”²⁰ The officers routinely ignored higher orders but faced little disciplinary action. Enlisted soldiers on the other

hand were subject to beatings, brandings, and executions even for small transgressions.²¹ One scholar on warlord China asserts, “The officers saw that soldiers were replaceable; they regarded them as stupid, only able to respond to harsh treatment. In the officers’ eyes, as in those of the civilians, soldiers were the scum of the earth.”²²

iii. Education: The Qing Model

The Chinese militarists inherited many of the educational institutions established during the late Qing’s military reforms. As part of an effort to expand military schooling, the Qing court in 1906 abolished the state-administered Confucian civil service test and encouraged local governments to build provincial military schools. The new officer education system contained three tiers. Students in the first tier attended a three-year program in one of 200 primary military schools in the provinces. Chinese warlords operated many of those provincial schools, which they viewed as fertile recruitment grounds to boost their manpower. After graduating from that level, students might have enrolled in one of four regional middle military schools: the Beijing, Nanjing, Wuchang, or Xian Military Schools. After two years of training at the middle schools, students then served one year of active duty before they possibly attended the Paoting Military Academy—the highest level of military education in China.²³

Foreign military thought influenced the teaching philosophies and training in all of those schools. At the highest level, Japanese and Prussian advisers taught in Paoting, mostly lecturing on Prussian tactics, trench warfare, fortifications, and defensive systems. A number of Chinese officers also attended foreign military schools—another late Qing initiative to improve the dynasty’s fighting forces. The bulk of those officers attended the Japanese Cadet Military Academy (Nihon Rikugun Shikan Gakko). In the late 1920s,

the importance of Shikan Gakko to China grew sharply, increasing from two students admitted in 1923 to over 100 students in 1929. Many of those officers returned to mainland China and taught in the provincial schools, including the influential warlord-governor at the Yunnan Military School, Ts'ai O. The Japanese-trained officers or the "Shikan Clique" emerged as China's military elites, most of whom received the rank of major immediately and general officer in their late twenties. China's military establishment therefore harnessed an officer's alumni identity to his advancement.²⁴

Yet the education system overall produced officers of little military value. Finding qualified instructors, curbing illiteracy, reducing opium addiction, and obtaining modern military manuals were chief hurdles to clear, particularly in the provincial schools where most of the lower-level officers were illiterate. One Chinese scholar asserts, "the officers produced by the schools not only lacked modern knowledge and training; they could not even read military maps."²⁵ Although foreign instructors introduced some new military principles to the education system, many Chinese students viewed those instructors as "spies and treated them with hostility."²⁶ Another key obstacle was the warlord command philosophy, which favored tradition over modern strategy and tactics. One Chinese scholar states that the army commanders defined "themselves in terms of the traditional Chinese hero [...] who elevated himself from humble background to fame and power by sheer personal valor and political acumen."²⁷

iv. Training: The Goose Step

Combat training and field exercises illuminated the dismal state of China's military education. The commander of the 15th US Infantry Regiment in China, Colonel William Meade Morrow, in the early 1920s observed various military exercises by some

of the better-trained Chinese armies. Morrow after viewing one exercise in the northwest reported that it resembled “one of our own of some 15 years ago.”²⁸ He reported that the infantry on the line all advanced in one jumbled formation, commanders positioned their artillery in the rear out of range, and the men absolutely ignored sanitation. Morrow identified the “worst deficiency” as the “lack of intelligence, knowledge, and instruction by the officers.”²⁹

Reporting from Russian military advisers and US attachés in the late 1920s continued to show a near total absence of professional training. Garrison training focused on useless drills, mostly on goose-stepping and other parade marches, at the expense of developing military administrators—a key requirement for the modern battlefield. Field service training was in worse shape. Combat practice lacked rifle, reconnaissance, communications, scouting, engineering, and field medicine.³⁰ Major Magruder in 1928 sharply concluded, “[...] there is not a single military leader in China today who has a sound conception of basic tactical doctrines or fundamental principles of training.”³¹

Part Two: The Red Army with Chinese Characteristics

During the KMT’s political consolidation in south China (1923-1927), Sun Yat-sen and his successor Chiang Kai-shek built the party’s military arm, the National Revolutionary Army. They based much of the army’s structure, education, and training on Soviet models and Chinese traditions, which imparted a key feature on the Nationalist Army: political command philosophy. Commanding the new Russian-trained KMT troops, Chiang Kai-shek pressed forward with the KMT’s plan to oust the warlords from power. In a series of military campaigns, the Nationalist Army co-opted various warlord

generals and absorbed some two million soldiers, imparting the second key feature on the KMT Army: residual warlordism.

i. The Setting: Building the Army

In the early 1920s, the KMT's military force represented a loose conglomerate of independent warlords and Chinese Communists in south China. Weighed against the recruitment, education, and training issues in most of China, the total fighting value of KMT troops amounted to little—save a few qualified commanders. The KMT's weak military standing weighed against its strong disagreements with the northern warlords convinced Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek that the KMT required a robust military force. Sun Yat-sen during that time declared, “Our most urgent goals [...] are to build a revolutionary army on the Soviet pattern and prepare a sufficiently reliable beachhead in the south for our campaign in the north.”³²

As part of their larger Marxist concept of “world revolution,” the Soviets sought to reinforce Sun Yat-sen's Chinese revolution. In mid-1923, Soviet interests converged with Sun Yat-sen's request for Soviet military training and assistance. As a result, Sun Yat-sen that same year sent Chiang Kai-shek to Moscow to study the Red Army's training system and to plan for a Soviet advisory mission in China. From 1924 to 1927, the Russians deployed some 1,000 advisers to south and north China. About 30 to 60 key personnel worked alongside the KMT in Canton, Kwangtung Province. Most of those advisers participated in the Bolshevik Revolution and graduated from the Red Army's Military Academy. Yet few were trained Sinologists or Chinese speakers.³³

ii. Education and Training: Blucher's Program

The Soviet's contribution to the KMT Army was not military modernization but rather political education and ideological indoctrination, a reflection of Russia's own military organization and doctrine during the interwar period.³⁴ General Vasili Blucher, who was one of the most influential Soviet advisers, attached the utmost importance to the military's political ideology. In May 1924, Soviet advisers under Chiang Kai-shek's guidance opened a new political-military school for the KMT, the Whampoa Military Academy. Whampoa heavily contributed to the Nationalist Army's rigid dependence on political loyalty over military proficiency.

Whampoa intended to separate the KMT from the common warlord armies. Sun Yat-sen in 1918 established the "Four Army Schools Alumni Association" to recruit officers from Paoting, the primary military schools in Tsinghai, and the primary and middle schools in Wuchang.³⁵ While the KMT recruited some students, professors, merchants, and career soldiers educated in the provincial military schools, its main recruitment pool, like the warlord armies, was rural China. In the third and fourth classes at Whampoa, for example, over 60 percent of the cadets were working-class peasants.³⁶ Unlike the common warlord armies, Whampoa candidates had to pass three levels of tests for admission to the school: the Medical Commission, the Mandate Commission, and the Examining Commission. Chiang Kai-shek and the Soviet advisers attached the most importance to the Mandate Commission, which tested the candidate's "political reliability" through 36 questions. Many of the questions showed a heavy Russian hand in the selection process, like question number ten that asked, "Who is Lenin."³⁷ The test quickly reduced the number of prospective students. Roughly 3,000 candidates applied for Whampoa's first class but only 500 were accepted.³⁸

Whampoa divided its instruction into five divisions or sections: political, infantry, artillery, supply, and technical. The Whampoa faculty dedicated most of their energies toward the political section. As one Russian adviser noted, Whampoa's first objective was "to obtain the best political training possible for the officers."³⁹ The faculty based the political education on the KMT's "ten theses," which stressed loyalty and dedication to the Nationalist Party before the country. Thesis one demanded, "soldiers must [...] sacrifice themselves for the sake of *their party* and their country." Thesis seven stated that cadets must understand that their duty "is to die for *the party* and the people without regret."⁴⁰ The political section taught classes on socio-economics, political economy, imperialism, Chinese and world history, and Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People" (Nationalism, Democracy, and Socialism). A typical school day lasted nine hours, including up to six hours of political instruction with less time for military training.⁴¹

The military training sections offered six-month infantry courses and eight-month specialty courses in artillery, engineering, communications, and supply. One of the lead Soviet advisers, Alexander Cherepanov, stated that the combat training stressed "rapid attack," "definite encirclement of the enemy," and counterattack.⁴² The availability of weapons limited the scope and scale of the training, however. Cherepanov stated that the average Chinese regiment only possessed rifles, two to four machine guns, and one small cannon.⁴³ To shore up KMT supplies, the Soviets in 1924 shipped 11,000 rifles to the KMT and later sent an additional 15,000 rifles, machine guns, and artillery pieces.⁴⁴ Yet those shipments did not alleviate the weapon-to-troop ratio. The Soviet advisers also

established medical and sanitation services, but the lack of supplies and hospitals reduced the KMT's capacity to train medics and care for the sick.⁴⁵

Reflecting the late Qing's reforms and the warlord system, Whampoa's faculty represented graduates from Shikan Gakko, the Paoting Military Academy, and the Yunnan Military School. The faculty contained three levels: chief, senior, and junior instructors. The majority of the chief and senior faculty members were Shikan Gakko graduates, including Whampoa's Commandant Chiang Kai-shek and the 1st Training Regiment Commander He Yingqin. Three of four Whampoa department heads also trained in Japan. Among the junior-level faculty members, about 20 percent originated from the Paoting Military Academy and the other 60 percent came from the Yunnan Military School.⁴⁶

Although the senior faculty trained in Japan and employed new Soviet doctrine, they ensured that traditional Chinese terms shaped Whampoa's identity—the *ti-yong* synthesis. An officer who served in the KMT Army stated that the academy “blended a knowledge of modern techniques with the traditional philosophy of Chinese warfare.”⁴⁷ For Whampoa, that philosophy drew from the lessons learned during the Tongzhi Restoration period (1860-1874), the Self-Strengthening movement (1861-1895), and traditional Confucian precepts.⁴⁸

The Tongzhi Restoration movement suppressed the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), saved the Qing Dynasty from collapse, and restored traditional Confucian values. Whampoa elites believed that the Restoration leaders succeeded because they possessed “stern moral character and insight into the workings of the Confucian social process.”⁴⁹ Chiang Kai-shek particularly praised Zeng Guofan, who he described as the “virtuous

man in public service who overcomes physical force with moral fortitude.”⁵⁰ As Commandant of Whampoa, Chiang selected Yunnan Governor Ts’ai O’s book, *Maxims of Zeng Guofan and Hu Luyi*, as the school’s flagship textbook. The text fused Confucian tenets with military leadership, which focused on five key principles: knowledge, sincerity, humaneness, discipline, and courage. That Whampoa “idealism” resembled the thoughts of other warlord commanders and militarists who believed that a commander’s moral virtue and valor alone could deliver victory.⁵¹

By December 1924, the Soviets had built the KMT’s first and second “indoctrinated training regiments,” modeled after the triangular organizations found in European and Russian armies during World War I. Three maneuver battalions made one regiment, totaling about 180 officers and 1,800 enlisted men.⁵² The 1st and 2nd Whampoa Regiments assembled into the “Academy Army,” which later became the nucleus of the Nationalist Army. As the Academy Army expanded, Blucher and the Whampoa leaders from April to December 1925 launched numerous reforms to raise the army’s fighting capacity, increase its discipline, promote esprit de corps, and above all advance political education. Blucher’s blueprints entitled “The Great Kuomintang Military Plan” focused on consolidating KMT political control over the various Chinese armies. The plan called on all units within the KMT fighting force to reorganize “along Whampoa lines.” Political training was “essential.”⁵³

As part of Blucher’s program, the Academy Army reorganized into a full brigade with three regiments, re-designated as the “Party Army” (the KMT Army). Mirroring the Soviet Red Army, a Chinese commissar system attached political workers to every level of command from army to platoon headquarters. The key function of the commissars

was to ensure KMT political control over army commanders. To enforce that system, political commissars usually out-ranked regimental and battalion army commanders.⁵⁴ The KMT Army's new organization also reinforced its strict adherence to political ideology and discipline. As the "supreme organ" of the KMT Army, the Political Bureau determined "the character of the army" and directly appointed members to the Military Council (table 1). Chiang Kai-shek in April 1926 became the Military Council Chairman. The Council enforced political obedience through the Military Tribunal, where many of the military edicts and laws ended with the penalty: "[...] or death by shooting."⁵⁵

Table 1: Administration of the Kuomintang Army, 1926

Political Bureau
Military Council
Political Directorate
Military Tribunal
General Staff
Administrative Staff

Source: "Document 27: Organization of the KMT Army," C. Martin Wilbur and Julie Lien-ying How, *Missionaries of Revolution: Soviet Advisers and Nationalist China, 1920-1927* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 618.

iii. The Results: Politically Loyal but Militarily Weak

From 1924 to 1926, the KMT expanded its army rapidly from two regiments to eight army corps with Chiang Kai-shek commanding. With the formal establishment of the KMT government in Canton during 1926, the KMT renamed its force the National Revolutionary Army. The Soviet's advisory efforts under Chiang Kai-shek's leadership generated two dominant features within the Nationalist Army's culture: political command philosophy and residual warlordism.

Political Command Philosophy. The Nationalist leaders valued political loyalty over military competency. As one Soviet adviser noted, "political consciousness" and

“political enlightenment” were the Nationalist Army’s “chief” weapons.⁵⁶ As Commandant of Whampoa, Chiang Kai-shek showed little interest in combat training. He instead sought to instill in the army unwavering obedience to the KMT leadership, particularly its right wing. Chiang and the Whampoa leaders employed two mechanisms to enforce obedience: the military law of collective responsibility (in Chinese, *nian zuo fa*) and the commissar system. Invented during the Ming Dynasty, that law permitted the summary execution of officers and enlisted men who chose to disobey higher orders. Chinese historian F. F. Liu submits that the “rigid application [of *nian zuo fa*] cost the early Whampoa graduates dearly in human lives.”⁵⁷ In addition, the commissar system enabled political leaders to control troop movements, promotions, and other regulations, which reduced the army field commanders’ influence. A commander’s orders were valid only if the army’s commissar signed them.

While Chiang Kai-shek and the Whampoa leaders focused on political discipline, they neglected training and resourcing the Nationalist Army for war. One Soviet officer likened the Nationalist Army’s equipment to the “epoch of Napoleon.”⁵⁸ The army possessed about one rifle for every 1,000 men and paid little attention to logistics, sanitation, medical supplies, and maintenance. The Soviets calculated that over 35 percent of the KMT Army’s rifles were obsolete or useless.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Nationalist Army during the interwar period primarily focused on positional warfare and defensive operations. The same Russian officer in 1926 opined that the army’s field training and firing exercises resembled the Russian Army’s before World War I.⁶⁰

Although Whampoa’s political ideology ingrained in the army an esprit de corps, it did not necessarily improve the army’s combat proficiency. Nationalist soldiers’ esprit

de corps produced great acts of courage but also revealed that KMT officers knew little about maneuvering units or force sustainment. During the Eastern Expeditions in the 1920s, for example, Nationalist commanders often employed “shock brigades” or “do-or-die detachments” (in Chinese, *gan si dui*) to assault fortified positions frontally. In warlord fashion, the volunteers for those detachments received material or financial benefits. Cherepanov in a report on the Nationalist attack against Huizhou Fortress in October 1925 wrote, “Here the senselessness of creating a shock company in an emergency was tragically obvious.”⁶¹ Those who survived the initial rush toward Huizhou’s walls “found themselves without cover, without entrenching tools, and without ladders.”⁶²

Writing to Chiang Kai-Shek in April 1925, Blucher reported many defects within the KMT Army. Blucher critiqued the Nationalist Army’s strategy and tactics even when its enemies retreated. He stated that the Nationalist Army suffered from a lack of “operational control, initiative, and sense of mutual aid.”⁶³ In one instance, he noted that Chiang Kai-shek “had no idea” where his units were fighting. Like Colonel Morrow’s appraisal of warlord China, Blucher asserted that army officers were “responsible for the bad reputation which the Chinese Army earned.”⁶⁴ Other Soviet assessments matched Blucher’s reports. One senior adviser at Whampoa stated, “Of the [Chinese] commanders, it can be said that they act without thinking [...] they do not know the general plan and aim of the battle [...]”⁶⁵ Major Magruder apparently agreed when he declared that the Soviet advisory mission “shows how much and again how little a group of foreign instructors and advisers can accomplish in China.”⁶⁶

Residual Warlordism. The National Revolutionary Army in July 1926 set out on the Northern Expedition to oust the opposition warlords from power. During that time, the Nationalist Army was not a united military force but instead a collection of armies mostly from Hunan, Kwangsi, Kwangtung, and Yunnan Provinces, totaling some 100,000 men formed into eight army corps.⁶⁷ He Yingqin led the 1st Army Corps, which represented the Whampoa graduates. Many of the low- and mid-ranking Nationalist commanders were incompetent, while their troops carried “discarded weapons of every conceivable description and manufacture.”⁶⁸ Accompanied by their Soviet advisers, the Nationalist troops engaged in a series of bloody campaigns with various warlord armies, like the six-week siege of Wuchang in late 1926. Yet the expedition, on the whole, showed Chiang’s heavy reliance on negotiations, balance-of-power tactics, and alliance building to neutralize his opponents. Chiang’s strategic plan for the expedition sought “to attack Wu Pei’fu, to maintain a friendly attitude towards Sun Ch’uan-fang, and to leave Chang Tso-lin temporarily alone.”⁶⁹

Chiang secured alliances with many of the southern warlords, like the powerful Li Zongren, by making concessions or bribes in exchange for their loyalty. In the North where Chiang faced the most opposition, he managed to co-opt three key warlords. Those alliances together with enemy defections to the Nationalist Army triggered a bandwagon effect that swelled the army’s ranks to some two million men. That enabled Chiang and the KMT to negotiate from a position of strength. In the final analysis, Chiang Kai-shek did not necessarily defeat the warlords and their soldiers; he more or less absorbed and assimilated them. Chiang’s Northern Expedition strategy would enable

the former warlords and regional power brokers to gain considerable influence in the Nationalist Army during the 1930s and 1940s.⁷⁰

Part Three: Die Deutsche Beraterschaft

During the Nanking decade (1927-1937), Chiang Kai-shek redoubled his efforts to modernize the Nationalist Army. With Chiang's guidance, a group of German advisers established a new system of military education in China, infused traditional Prussian doctrine and German tactics into the Nationalist Army's academies, and trained and equipped 30 Nationalist divisions. Yet the Nationalist Army's political command philosophy, its concept of quantitative superiority, its penchant for traditional philosophies, and residual warlordism complicated German efforts to transfer their military models to the Chinese.

i. The Setting: After the Northern Expedition

As the decisive phases of the Northern Expedition ended in late 1927 and 1928, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Army emerged as the dominant political force in China. After moving the KMT's base from Canton to Nanking, Chiang Kai-shek emerged as the de facto dictator of the KMT's right wing. He split with the Communists, who after Sun Yet-sen's death in 1925 pushed to gain more control over the KMT, and expelled the Soviet advisory mission. Chiang's quarrel with the Chinese Communists together with lingering warlordism posed an acute internal threat to the Nanking regime (map one). Moreover, the KMT's loose control over China and the shifting alliances among the Nationalist Army commanders reduced Chiang's capacity to manage those threats effectively. As a result, Chiang and his key lieutenants intensified their efforts to build a more cohesive and modern army.⁷¹

After the expulsion of the Soviet advisers, Chiang Kai-shek immediately turned to Germany for military assistance. Since his early youth, Chiang had expressed profound respect for the Prussian military tradition and tried twice to attend military schooling there. In 1927, Chiang requested that German General Erich von Ludendorff, the former deputy to General Paul von Hindenburg, serve as the KMT's lead military adviser. Given Ludendorff's rank and the limitations imposed on Germany by the 1919 Versailles Treaty, Ludendorff instead sent his former Chief of Operations Colonel Max Bauer to assess the situation.⁷²

Bauer's visit in 1927 triggered a decade-long military relationship between the two countries but mostly under the cover of economic assistance. From 1928 to 1937, the number of German advisers in China ranged from 40 to 100 personnel. The advisers mostly were ex-officers of the Reichswehr and part of Ludendorff's ultra-nationalist circle, which had participated in Adolf Hitler's failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.⁷³ The advisers represented some of Germany's most brilliant military minds, including General Hans von Seeckt, the successor of von Hindenburg, and General Alexander von Falkenhausen.⁷⁴

According to the New York Times article "German Militarism a Problem in China," Bauer in 1928 returned to China with 46 advisers and engaged in a large-scale effort to build a modern military and war industry for the Nationalist regime.⁷⁵ While Bauer designed the original formula for reorganizing and training the Nationalist Army, Hans von Seeckt's "Denkschrift für Marshall Chiang Kai-Shek" refined the German approach. Seeckt's denkschrift, like Blucher's Great Plan, emerged as the blueprint for the Nationalist Army's reorganization. Seeckt proposed three key ideas: "(1) that the

army is the foundation of the ruling power; (2) that the effectiveness of the army lies in qualitative superiority; (3) that the value of an army depends upon the value of its officer corps.”⁷⁶ Against that backdrop, Chiang working with the German advisory mission moved to rebuild China’s military education, retrain its officers, and demobilize the army into a lighter but tougher force.

ii. Education: The Prussian Tradition

The Nationalist Army’s new education system reflected Germany’s own traditional design. It contained three levels of instruction. The basic level taught cadets at the new Central Military Academy in Nanking. The intermediate level offered over 24 special service schools at the post-graduate level, including schools in chemical warfare, transport, supply, artillery, engineering, medical, ordnance, finance, and veterinary. The highest level of instruction sent officers to the new Army Staff College of China or to foreign countries for military studies.⁷⁷

The Nanking Central Military Academy replaced Whampoa as China’s principal military school. About five to seven full-time German faculty members taught at the academy, where students traded their old Japanese manuals for new German ones. The advisers concentrated on military theory, tactics, and technical training. They drew lessons from German history and the great Prussian generals, like Boyen, Scharnhorst, and Moltke. Other lessons taught students about the strategy and tactics of World War I, such as the 1914 encirclement of Tannenberg. The academy by 1937 had graduated 6,000 junior officers.⁷⁸

The German advisers also reorganized the old Military Staff College in Peking into the new Army Staff College of China (in Chinese, *Luda*). *Luda* offered a three-year

“regular course” for officers above captain rank and a one-year “special course” for senior officers. The regular course taught staff officers how to plan and execute division-size maneuvers. German and some French instructors taught many of the courses at the Staff College. Like the Central Academy, the instruction stressed the lessons of Moltke, Schlieffen, World War I, and the Napoleonic Wars. By 1937, Luda had graduated some 2,000 general staff officers.⁷⁹

The Nationalist regime also standardized foreign military training, which increased Chinese admissions to German schools. By 1936, the army had retained roughly 2,000 officers with foreign military education. Although the majority attended Shikan Gakko, a few hundred officers obtained diplomas from some of the most prestigious military schools in the Western world. In the United States, 54 Chinese officers graduated from Fort Leavenworth, Fort Sill, the Virginia Military Institute (VMI), West Point, Norwich University in Vermont, and the Citadel in South Carolina. In France, some 35 officers attended Saint Cyr, École Polytechnique, and École de Guerre. About an equal number of Chinese officers graduated from the Kriegsakademie and other elite German schools. In England, some 12 officers enrolled in the Imperial Defense College and Sandhurst.⁸⁰

iii. Training: The Model Force

The German training program sought to build a smaller but qualitatively superior force. Falkenhausen in a letter to Chiang Kai-shek in 1935 stated, “The Chinese Army in its present state is not fit to face a modern war [...] the formation of, firstly, a small but highly operative army remains of paramount importance.”⁸¹ To achieve that goal, the German advisers imported the Legrbrigade (training brigade) concept—the same one

used to scale down the massive German Imperial Army after World War I. The initial plan entailed building a nucleus of ten “model divisions,” which would train other Nationalist units to increase the pace of the German army-building program in China. By 1937, eight German-trained and -equipped divisions had formed the core of the new “Central Army,” which was the successor unit to Chiang Kai-shek’s old 1st Corps and 1st Army Group of the Northern Expedition. The Central Army initially totaled some 300,000 troops forming into 30 divisions, all of which had some level of German training.⁸²

Linked to that training was the German plan to demobilize the Nationalist Army and purge ineffective commanders. Bauer and Hans von Seeckt’s demobilization plans sought to reduce the size of the army but increase its proficiency, giving the army mobility and decreasing its expenditures. During the final phases of the Northern Expedition in 1929, the Nationalist Army counted almost 300 divisions with about two million men. The plan would lower those numbers to about 700,000 troops formed into 65 infantry divisions and 32 artillery, cavalry, and engineer regiments.⁸³ The disbanded soldiers would transfer into a newly formed “reconstruction force,” which was part of Bauer’s larger concept for building China’s war and economic industries.⁸⁴ Other disbanded troops would serve in local police units to enforce law and order. The Nanking regime established the “Army Reorganization Committee” as a forum to discuss demobilization with the various warlord armies and other armed groups.⁸⁵

Rearmament was another key component of the German training program. Germany engaged in a broad effort to rebuild Chinese arsenals and to export German weaponry to China. The Germans modernized at least seven main Chinese arsenals, like

the Kung-hsien arsenal where the Germans built factories for mustard gas, chemical agents, and gas masks. The Germans also established a private organization, Hapro, to manage weapons shipments to China. German arms sales to China increased from eight percent of Germany's total weapons exports in 1935 to 28 percent in 1936, making the Nationalist Army Germany's number one customer. The exported weapons were the same makes and models used by the Wehrmacht, like the new Krupp 75mm guns and Henschel and M.A.N. tanks. The defense of Nanking relied on German air defense systems and German 88mm anti-aircraft guns. The weapons arrived in "total supply packages" to equip whole divisions.⁸⁶ A Russian correspondent wrote, "Entire divisions, from their rifles and tanks down to their very helmets, were outfitted with German military equipment [...]"⁸⁷

iv. The Results: Technical Training for Traditional Strategies

The German education and training effort on the whole suffered from the Nationalist Army's political command philosophy, its concept of quantitative superiority, its penchant for traditional philosophies, and residual warlordism.

Political Command Philosophy. The German advisers and Nationalist leaders failed to cultivate an effective general staff corps. Whereas Germany's war academy, the Kriegsakademie, stressed the concept of *auftragstaktik* or "mission-oriented" command, the Nationalist Army taught "political-oriented" command. *Auftragstaktik* trained German officers "to do without question or doubt whatever the situation required, as he personally saw it. Omission and inactivity were considered worse than a wrong choice of expedient."⁸⁸ On the other end of the spectrum, the Nationalist Army demanded

unwavering political loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT without question, which left little room for initiative on the battlefield.⁸⁹

The key test of political loyalty was alumni identity. Chiang Kai-shek and the top-level army leaders harnessed education to politics, despite German attempts to sever that link. An officer's diploma determined his political loyalty and thus his eligibility for advancement. The army reserved most of its command and staff positions for the trusted alumni of Whampoa (the Central Military Academy), Paoting, Luda, select provincial military schools, and older Shikan graduates.⁹⁰

That dynamic corrupted the Nationalist Army's promotion and reward system. Whampoa and Luda graduates by 1947 had dominated the general-officer ranks of the Nationalist Army, but those schools did not necessarily represent the army's best military strategists.⁹¹ A US military attaché report in 1943 stated that Luda was the "weakest link in the military school system of China."⁹² Chinese historian F. F. Liu asserts that Nationalist staff officers "knew a great deal about the trees but could not plan a way out of the forest."⁹³ German advisers assessed that the officers trained at Whampoa from 1924 to 1927 were "only moderately better as military units than earlier warlord armies. Their real value to Chiang Kai-shek lay in their political loyalty, not in tactical, logistical, or administrative expertise."⁹⁴

The Nationalist Army therefore left less room in its command and staff positions for Western-trained Chinese officers, many of whom showed strong military faculty. As of 1944, the Nationalist Army awarded only 430 foreign-trained officers with the rank of general, representing about 10 percent of the 4,200 general officers. A scholar who surveyed foreign-trained Chinese officers submits that those officers returning from the

US military schools found themselves as “outsiders in their national military establishment [...]”⁹⁵ The Nationalist regime posted most of the US-trained officers to the Ministry of Finance, where they staffed the Revenue Guard Brigade. That brigade, known as the “Salt Troop,” protected the Nationalist regime’s monopoly over the salt trade.⁹⁶ Chinese alumni from West Point, VMI, and other US schools commanded Salt Troops, which US attaché Lieutenant Colonel Drysdale labeled the most “most efficient” troops in all of China.⁹⁷ Yet until Japan’s full-scale invasion of China pressed the Nationalist regime for all available resources, the regime did not count Salt Troops on the army’s own lines.⁹⁸

Quantity over Quality. Although the Germans taught the concepts of combined arms, offensive-defense, and the “war of movement” at Luda and the Central Military Academy, the teaching focused more on theoretical discussions than field exercises. That left Nationalist staff officers and commanders unable to adapt those theories to their own wars against the Japanese and the Chinese Communists. Moltke’s theories on the tactical defense combined with the operational and strategic offense, for example, did not necessarily translate with the Chinese troops.⁹⁹

During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the Nationalist Army’s strategy focused on “winning by outlasting,” in which the army fought multicorps’ defensive battles to wear down the Japanese forces. Chinese historian F. F. Liu argues that the Nationalist staff officers “unduly” centered military planning on Maginot- and Hindenburg-type defense lines.¹⁰⁰ The Nationalist Army defended with its mass but without sufficient maneuver.

The Battle of Shanghai in 1937 underscores that point. The Nationalist regime with German assistance built a series of defensive works between Shanghai and Nanking called the “Far Eastern Hindenburg Line.” During the battle, the Chinese fiercely defended their positions on order from Chiang Kai-shek. After months of resistance, the Nationalist Army abandoned China’s Hindenburg Line and retreated in disorder while six highly mobile Japanese columns punched through Chinese lines.¹⁰¹ Chiang Kai-shek’s own diaries on the battle state, “There was no sense of doing thing by stages. All the troops retreated in a rush. There was no order or control.”¹⁰² Labeled as China’s Verdun, the Nationalist Army in three months suffered 367,000 casualties, including about a third of Chiang Kai-shek’s 300,000-strong Central Army—the centerpiece of the German advisory mission. The Japanese with roughly 71,500 casualties rolled on Shanghai and sacked the Nationalist capital of Nanking.¹⁰³

German advisers attached to Chinese units in Shanghai reported a number of operational and tactical mistakes committed by some of the best-trained and best-led divisions, like the 87th and 88th Divisions—identified as “Chiang’s own.” One German adviser remarked that “service [support], leadership, and staff work” were lacking in all divisions. He reported that the army’s staff headquarters lacked the most basic battlefield data, like casualties and maps. The adviser underlined that “not a single radio in the army area was in working order.” The staff headquarters “had no direct communication” with its divisions and “in the whole field of operations there was not a single car repair station in running order.”¹⁰⁴ Like Cherepanov’s appraisal on the Huizhou Fortress battle, one Chinese historian submits that “do-or-die tactics” accounted for a significant percentage of the Chinese casualties at Shanghai.¹⁰⁵ Non-combat factors, like illiteracy, also reduced

the army's effectiveness. A US military attaché report indicated that nearly 50 percent of the 87th Division's enlisted men were illiterate.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the Battle of Shanghai, the Nationalist Army's first four "Encirclement Campaigns" against the Communists underlined its preference of quantity to quality. The campaigns on the whole exposed the Nationalist Army's combat inefficiency against a numerically inferior foe. During the first and second campaigns, the Nationalists outnumbered the Communists 2.4 to one and 4.5 to one, respectively. The official KMT history nonetheless states that the Communists "out-maneuvered and out-fought" the Nationalist Army, which left whole divisions decimated on the battlefield.¹⁰⁷ In the fourth campaign, the Nationalist Army outmatched the Communists six to one but did not achieve lasting gains. In one battle, a Communist element mauled the Nationalist 52nd Division in a 48-hour fight, leaving at least 6,000 of the division's troops dead and wounded. As the KMT struggled in the initial fights with the Communists, the army employed its quantitative superiority to cope with the problem. Yet deploying additional troops did not translate to immediate victory (table 2). One scholar submits that the Nationalist Army lost the first four campaigns because army units, in warlord fashion, "milked" the countryside of resources, fueling resentment among local communities and pushing residents into the Communist camp.¹⁰⁸

Table 2: The Encirclement Campaigns: Nationalist-to-Communist Troop Ratios

Campaign/Year	Nationalist	Communists	Ratio
(1) 1930-31	100,000	42,000	2.4 to 1
(2) 1931	200,000	44,000	4.5 to 1
(3) 1931	130,000*	55,000	2.4 to 1
(4) 1932-33	394,000	65,000	6.1 to 1
(5) 1933-34	800,000	150,000	5.3 to 1

* Casualties and sickness from the first two campaigns lowered the Nationalist Army's troop numbers during the third campaign.

Sources: Harry H. Collier and Paul Chin-Chih Lai, *Organizational Changes in the Chinese Army, 1895-1950* (Taipei, Taiwan: Republic of China War History Bureau, Office of Military History, May 1969), 159-162; Edward L. Dreyer, *China At War: 1901-1949* (New York: Longman Group, 1995), 162-200.

Traditionalism. The Nationalist Army also upheld the ti-yong synthesis, which at times reduced the Germans to technical suppliers rather than military advisers. One Chinese scholar argues, “There was a belief among some Chinese generals that the Germans’ advice [...] was impractical because they did not understand the psychology of Chinese soldiers, or the historical backgrounds of particular units, or the intricacy of power relations between the commanders.”¹⁰⁹ That dynamic created a gap between what the Germans taught in the classrooms and how the Chinese fought on the battlefield. The Battle of Taierchuang and the Encirclement Campaigns underscore that point.

While the Battle of Taierchuang in 1938 showcased the value of tactical German military advice, it also exposed the difficulty in transferring German battle doctrine fully to Nationalist Army leaders. During the 17-day battle, the Chinese effectively defended the city using night attacks and German-made 150mm howitzers, killing and wounding 10,000 to 16,000 Japanese troops and leaving 240 enemy tanks and vehicles inoperable.¹¹⁰ Taierchuang was a key victory because the city offered passage to the Nationalist Army’s 3rd War Area Headquarters at Hsuchow. Yet the Nationalists did not exploit their victory. General Falkenhausen said, “I will tell the Generalissimo [Chiang Kai-shek] to advance, to attack, to exploit his success. But nothing was done. Soon the Japanese will have 8 or 10 divisions before Hsuchow.”¹¹¹ Deputy of the Nationalist Army’s General Staff Bai Chongxi—a former opposition warlord with Li Zongren’s group in south China—did not see the value in the attack. Bai along with other top-level Nationalist Army commanders preferred the concept of “winning by outlasting.”¹¹² He reportedly told the German advisers, “We can afford to lose four men if the Japanese lose

one.”¹¹³ Only a month after the Nationalists’ victory at Taierchuang, the Japanese rolled on Chinese lines and captured the 3rd War Area Headquarters at Hsuehchow.¹¹⁴

The Encirclement Campaigns also underlined the gap between what the Germans taught or advised and how the Chinese fought. In an attempt to bolster the Nationalists’ position for the third campaign, for example, German adviser General Georg Wetzell’s proposed strategy “was adopted in principle but disregarded in practice. The rapid war of movement that he [Wetzell] sought gave way to a painfully slow forward thrust,” enabling the Communist to retreat and regroup.¹¹⁵ During the fifth encirclement campaign in 1934, the Nationalists used elements of Zeng Guofan’s “blockhouse” strategy—the same one used against the Taipei rebels in the 1860s. One scholar claimed that the tactics “did not belong to the 20th century, but to the medieval times.”¹¹⁶ While the Nationalist Army overwhelmed the Communists in that campaign, fielding some 800,000 troops to fight 150,000 Communists, the German advisers showed impatience with the army’s strategy. In their view, the strategy allowed the Communists to escape. In October 1934, the battered Communists began their “Long March” to north China.¹¹⁷

Residual Warlordism. The Nationalist Army’s size and composition thwarted Chiang Kai-shek’s and the German advisers’ demobilization plans. Although the Germans by 1937 had trained and equipped some 300,000 Nationalist troops, the army’s remaining 1.7 million troops retained warlord-era training and education. The majority of those troops served under former warlords and regional or provincial army leaders who showed fleeting loyalty to the Nanking regime.¹¹⁸ Table three shows that the KMT only controlled about four of every ten divisions in combat during Japan’s initial offensive in China.

Table 3: Number of Chinese Divisions in Combat, 1937-1939

Year	KMT	Others*	Total	Percent KMT
1937	89	164	253	0.35
1938	80	119	199	0.40
1939	130	173	303	0.43

* Includes regional army leaders, provincial leaders, and former warlords.

Source: Hsi-Sheng Ch'i, "The Military Dimension, 1942-1945" in *China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan, 1937-1941*, ed. James C. Hsiung and Steven I. Levine (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 178.

Based on the traditional warlord system, the provincial leaders perceived Nanking's demobilization plan as a conspiracy to reduce them militarily and rob their political power. The disbandment conferences between Chiang and the regional forces in 1929 broke down when various factions chose to split—at least temporarily—with the Nationalist regime. Li Zongren, the southern warlord and Chiang's ally in the Northern Expedition, withdrew his support from the government and attacked Nationalist Army units in Honan Province. Various armies in the northwest also broke their allegiance with the government and rallied around Chiang's other one-time ally, the powerful northern warlord Feng Yu-hsiang.¹¹⁹

Those shifting alliances, like Li Zongren and Feng Yu-hsiang, posed a dilemma for Chiang Kai-Shek during China's war against Japan and in the final phases of the Chinese Civil War. On the one hand, the regional troops represented the bulk of the Nationalist Army. The Nanking regime needed to pacify and recruit its provincial and warlord opponents in order to fight its real enemies, particularly after the Battle of Shanghai where the Central Army lost a third of its manpower. On the other hand, those warlord opponents displayed shaky loyalty to the regime and sometimes defied its authority violently. The key to the system was a balance-of-power strategy, in which Chiang offered opponents command and staff positions in exchange for some level of loyalty or obedience to the Nanking regime.¹²⁰

A review of the major army commands during the Second Sino-Japanese War shows Chiang’s balancing strategy at work. The Nationalist War Area commanders wielded significant military, political, and legal authority in their respective regions, including the movement of troops, military training, and conscription. Regional military leaders and former warlords held command positions in many of the War Areas. As the Japanese launched their invasion, Chiang gave the Nationalist Army’s 5th War Area to Li Zongren and the 6th War Area to Feng Yu-hsiang. Table four highlights that regional leaders, many of whom were not Whampoa graduates, by 1944 had dominated command positions in the War Areas, group armies, and divisions.¹²¹

Table 4: Profile of China’s Most Powerful Generals, 1944

Education	War Area CDR/D*	Group Army CDR/D	Army CDR	Divisions CDR	Administrative CDR
Whampoa	1	31	40	132	99
Paoting	18	36	37	48	76
Foreign	4	5	-	-	15
Provincial	13	23	34	101	85
Total	36	95	111	314**	275

* Commander (CDR); Deputy Commander (D)

** 33 commanders unknown

Source: Hsi-Sheng Ch’i, *Nationalist China At War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937-45* (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press: 1982), 230.

Although Whampoa leaders retained significant control over the Nationalist Army’s high command, the regional and provincial leaders heavily influenced battlefield outcomes—often for the worse. The Nationalist Army’s debacle during its 1939 Winter Offensive showed how regional leaders shaped the battlefield. During the offensive, many regional commanders, who “valued their equipment more than the lives of their soldiers,” refused to take the initiative and maneuver against the Japanese.¹²² “They continued to adhere to the ultraconservative tactic of concentrating a large force to attack

a fixed enemy position.”¹²³ The Winter Offensive showed a divided command and a disjointed strategy.

As Japan continued its onslaught against the Nationalists, Hitler’s tighter alliance with the Japanese shuttered the German advisory mission. While the German advisers departed in 1937 and 1938, the Japanese reinforced their military offensive in China. During the first phase of the offensive (July 1937 to November 1941), the Nationalists and Japanese fought 772 major engagements and 13 decisive battles. During that phase, Japan at its height deployed about 30 divisions supported by air and naval assets, while the Nationalist Army fielded over 200 divisions in combat. The Japanese dominated the fight, enabling them to control all of north China, key cities and ports on the Chinese coastline, and Indochina. Japan’s disposition set a near-total blockade around China, severing almost all of its lines of communications with the outside world. The battles left some 2.4 million Chinese regular troops dead and wounded, quickly prompting the KMT to adopt a new but faulty conscription system. With the Nationalist government’s headquarters forced back toward the Himalayan Range in Yunnan Province, the situation was desperate.¹²⁴

Part Four: The Far Eastern XYZ Affair

The United States from 1940 to 1948 advised and assisted the Nationalist Army in one of the largest foreign advisory missions to that point in US Army history. That mission at its peak deployed over 4,800 advisers to assist over 30 Chinese divisions. Like the Soviet and German missions, US combat trainers fought uphill against the Nationalist Army’s cultural features of endurance, residual warlordism, traditionalism, and political command philosophy, which reduced the army’s effectiveness in training

and in battle. This section will focus on the US Army's advisory mission from 1942 to early 1945, when the bulk of the training and combat occurred.¹²⁵

i. The Setting: From Pearl Harbor to Burma

After Germany, Japan, and Italy in September 1940 signed the Tripartite Pact, the United States began reinforcing China with military and economic aid to contain Japanese aggression in the Pacific. In December 1941 after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the US redoubled its efforts to strengthen China's position. The Combined Allied Chiefs of Staff formally established the China Theater with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek commanding. To manage Sino-American wartime relations, the War Department appointed US Army General Joseph Stilwell as the Generalissimo's chief of staff and commander of US Army Forces in the China-Burma-India Theater. Stilwell, who spoke fluent Mandarin, served three tours in China during the 1920s and 1930s, including one tour as the US military attaché in Beijing. The War Department tasked Stilwell with "improving the combat efficiency" of the Chinese Army and carrying out the "Thirty Division Program," which sought to equip and train 30 Nationalist divisions in "modern combat methods."¹²⁶

Japanese war plans for Burma, however, trumped the War Department's plans for China. When General Stilwell arrived in theater during February 1942, Japan was on the verge of blockading all of China. Four elite Japanese Army divisions in January 1942 invaded Burma in an effort to sever China's last ground line of communication to the outside world: the Burma Road (map two). Chiang Kai-shek deployed the Chinese Expeditionary Force (CEF) to augment the Allied defenders in Burma, comprised of British, Indian, and Burmese troops. The CEF represented some of Chiang's best

fighting units, totaling nine divisions with some 100,000 troops from the 5th, 6th, and 66th Chinese Armies (appendix one). Chiang gave General Stilwell nominal command authority over CEF troops.¹²⁷

The Allied lines crumbled rapidly as the Japanese advanced north. Japanese pressure by late April had forced the Allies into a general withdrawal toward the British military base in Manipur State, India. The Allied force fought and stumbled out of Burma while Japan completed its strategic encirclement of China, capturing most of north Burma and parts of Yunnan Province. By May 1942, the only remaining Allied supply route into China was over “the Hump.” That route flew supplies from Manipur over the Himalayan Range to Yunnan—the US military’s largest and most dangerous air-supply route during World War II (map three).¹²⁸

The hellacious retreat from Burma split the CEF into two sections. The 22nd and 38th Divisions and portions of other units withdrew to India while another six divisions retreated to Yunnan.¹²⁹ As the Japanese pressed the withdrawing Chinese troops into the Burmese jungles and through the mountains of the Hukawng Valley, flashfloods, monsoon rains, leeches, malaria, dysentery, and tropical ulcers wreaked havoc on CEF troops. The Chinese 5th Army Corps headquarters and the 22nd Division, for example, began the retreat with 9,000 men but entered India with only 3,700 troops.¹³⁰

The Burma withdrawal exposed many shortfalls within the Nationalist Army, particularly with its combat support and leadership. The Nationalist Army’s inability to provide service support to CEF troops greatly increased Chinese casualties. During the campaign, the army only deployed five Chinese doctors, nine ambulance trucks, and a group of ill-trained Chinese medics and nurses to support nine army infantry divisions.¹³¹

General Stilwell asserted, the Chinese soldier “expects no medical attention if he is sick or wounded [...]”¹³² A Chinese nurse who survived the ordeal, speaking in an interview in 2010, said that the army lacked supplies to care for and transport the wounded soldiers. That forced CEF commanders to abandon their wounded troops, who chose to burn themselves alive than die on the jungle floor. The nurse declared, “It was a collective suicide.”¹³³

Top-level CEF commanders also disregarded much of Stilwell’s advice and instead took orders directly from the Generalissimo, which stifled operational flexibility and battlefield initiative. Stilwell in a diary entry on 1 April wrote, “Through stupidity, fear, and the defensive attitude we have lost a grand chance to slap the [Japanese] back at Toungoo [central Burma]. The basic reason is Chiang Kai-shek’s meddling.”¹³⁴ Stilwell in his official history of the campaign noted that senior officers put “personal ambition before duty.” Chinese politics was the driver of inefficiency and waste within the Nationalist Army.¹³⁵ Stilwell, for example, demanded that Chiang Kai-shek relieve General Tu Yu-ming, who was a Whampoa first-class graduate commanding the 5th Army. Stilwell also claimed that only three of nine army division commanders showed military competence, including the VMI graduate and former Salt Troop commander General Sun Li-jen and the Saint Cyr graduate General Liao Yao-hsiang.¹³⁶

Against that backdrop, Stilwell in late May drafted a set of reforms for the Nationalist Army, which called for the “overhaul of the entire organization.”¹³⁷ Like von Seeckt’s *denkschrift*, Stilwell’s “Notes for the Generalissimo” stressed the importance of retraining the officer corps, reducing the size of the army, and centralizing its command structures. Stilwell underlined the need to purge ineffective officers, especially at the

division and army levels. He noted, “without a clearing out of the inefficient, the Army will continue to go down hill, no matter how much materiel is supplied for it.”¹³⁸ His notes concluded, “the Army will be smaller, but it will be far more efficient and easier to supply and handle.”¹³⁹

Stilwell later received news that Chiang rejected his proposals because they were not “realistic” and did not consider “certain influences.”¹⁴⁰ Reorganizing or purging the Nationalist Army along Stilwell’s lines meant reducing Chiang’s control over Nationalist generals, former warlords, and regional leaders who staffed key army positions.

Although the Generalissimo did not concur with Stilwell’s total reform approach, Nationalist and US officials from June 1942 to September 1943 mapped out a reform plan for 60 Chinese divisions, which entailed revitalizing the old “Thirty Division Program” while adding a “Second Thirty Program.”¹⁴¹

ii. Education and Training: China’s Leavenworth, Benning, and Sill

The US Army with Chiang Kai-shek’s guidance opened three training centers to enable Stilwell’s mission: the Ramgarh Training Center in India, the Kunming Training Center in Yunnan, and the Kweilin Training Center in east China. Stilwell labeled Chinese troops trained in Ramgarh as X-Force and troops in the Kunming center as Y-Force. Together, those forces comprised the first thirty divisions. The second thirty divisions, labeled Z-Force, would train in the Kweilin center. After completing training, X-Force and Y-Force would spearhead the attack back into Burma to defeat the Japanese and reopen the ground line of communication. Z-Force would defend airfields in east China, push the Japanese from the Yangtze valley, and cooperate with the proposed Allied landing on China’s east coast (map four).¹⁴²

X-Force. To coordinate the US training program in India with the Chinese War Ministry in Kunming, Stilwell activated the Chinese Army in India (CAI), Command Headquarters. As CAI commander, Stilwell appointed General Haydon Boatner to serve as his chief of staff. Boatner in the early 1930s attended the US Army's language program in China and served as the assistant attaché in Beijing. Stilwell hoped to use Boatner's China experience to build rapport with their Chinese counterparts. On the Chinese side, Chiang Kai-shek appointed General Lo Cho-ying, a Whampoa graduate and Stilwell's executive officer during the Burma retreat, as deputy CAI commander.¹⁴³

The Ramgarh plan intended to train two full Chinese divisions with three artillery regiments, an engineer regiment, and ten artillery battalions. Chiang Kai-shek by late 1942 had agreed to send an additional 23,000 Chinese troops from China to Ramgarh for training, increasing X-Force to roughly 31,000 Chinese troops. The US Army selected 52 officers and 138 enlisted men as the first Ramgarh training force. The Ramgarh center focused on unit training from the squad to regimental level. The center divided its instruction into four main sections with various components (table five). Based on the US War Department's Field Manual 21-6, the US instructors translated various military doctrinal publications for the Chinese students. Given the triple-canopy in most of north Burma, Ramgarh's infantry training stressed the concepts of jungle warfare. The center conducted an eight-day course in those concepts, devoting five days to learning techniques and three days for live field exercises. All infantry troops trained on the Enfield rifle, the Bren gun, the Thompson submachine gun, and the anti-tank M3 gun.¹⁴⁴

Table 5: Ramgarh Training Center: Sections and Components, 1943-1944

Armor	Artillery	Infantry	Special Units
Automotive Animal	Transport	Jungle Warfare	Animal Transport

Communications	Detail	Tactics	Chemical Warfare
Engineer	Mortar and Material	Weapons	Chinese Language
Tactics	Sub-Caliber Range		Engineer
Weapons			Medical
			Motor School
			Ordnance
			Signal
			Veterinary

Source: "Annual Report for 1943: Chinese Army in India," 7 February 1944, Rear Echelon Headquarters, Chinese Army in India (Chih Hui Pu), APO 628, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, Records of the U.S. Forces in the China-Burma-India Theaters of Operations, Record Group 493.

By late 1943, the Ramgarh center had trained over 31,000 officers and enlisted men, who formed the core of the New 22nd Division led by Liao Yao-hsiang and the New 38th Division led by Sun Li-jen. During that same month, an additional 11,000 Chinese troops from the 30th Division were undergoing training. Those three divisions formed CAI's main combat element: the New First Army led by General Cheng Tung-kuo, who graduated from the Central Military Academy in 1934. CAI also attached special troop units, service support, and armor formations to its headquarters, including the combined Sino-American tank unit with about 145 Stuart M3A3 medium tanks (appendix two).¹⁴⁵

To advise and assist X-Force in combat, Stilwell developed a liaison system in which each Chinese division down to the battalion level fought alongside a US Army colonel with a staff of advisers. The US War Department also deployed a US infantry unit totaling 3,000 troops to augment Stilwell's Burma operations. Designated the 5307th Composite Unit and codenamed GALAHAD, this all-volunteer US infantry unit in October 1943 arrived in India where they began training in special operations and jungle warfare (appendix two).¹⁴⁶

Y-Force. Whereas Stilwell commanded the Chinese troops in the Ramgarh center, the Chinese Ministry of Training retained command authority over its troops in

the Kunming center. The Nationalist government split the command of Y-Force between provincial and central government leaders. Chiang Kai-shek gave Yunnan's warlord-governor Long Yun command of the 9th, 5th, and 1st Group Armies based on the Indo-China border and in reserve at Y-Force Headquarters in Kunming. Chiang appointed his longtime ally General Chen Cheng—who was a Whampoa first-class graduate—to command the 11th and 20th Group Armies near the Yunnan-Burmese border (appendix three).¹⁴⁷

Working with the Nationalist government, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Dorn in April 1943 launched the Y-Force training program. Based on the same logic as Boatner's appointment, Stilwell selected Dorn because he was one of the US Army's leading China experts. A graduate of West Point, Dorn participated in the US Army's language program in China and served as Stilwell's assistant attaché in Beijing. Dorn's staff over the next eight months increased to about 2,300 advisers who operated several army schools for the Chinese (table six).¹⁴⁸

Table 6: Kunming Training Center: Schools and Programs, 1943-1944

School	Activated
Field Artillery Training Center	Apr 1943
Infantry Training Center	Apr 1943
Travelling Instruction Groups	Jun-Oct 1943
Interpreters School	Jul 1943
Kutsing Technical/Automotive School	Aug 1943
Medical/Veterinary School	Sept-Nov 1943
Command and General Staff School	May 1944
Ordnance Training Center	Oct 1944

Source: "Historical Report for 1943," 10 July 1944, Headquarters, Y-Force Operations Staff, United States Army Forces China-Burma-India, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland, Records of the U.S. Forces in the China-Burma-India Theaters of Operations, Record Group 493.

Whereas Ramgarh focused on unit training, the Y-Force program centered on training individuals. Those individuals, along with a small US liaison team, would return

to their parent unit to train them in US techniques and doctrine. The training program's critical elements were the Field Artillery Training Center (FATC), the Infantry Training Center (ITC), the Traveling Instruction Groups (TIGs), and the Command and General Staff School.¹⁴⁹

FATC's organization and instruction mirrored the US Army's Field Artillery School in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. One adviser called FATC the "miniature Fort Sill."¹⁵⁰ General Jerome Waters, who graduated from the US Army's Command and General Staff College, served as the senior FATC instructor. The center's academic department taught an eight-week course that stressed observed fires, fire control instruments, forward observation, the conduct and sequence of fire commands, and firing data computation. The advisers also taught T-bracket instruction to lay accurate fire on enemy pillboxes and other point targets. The center primarily used 75mm pack howitzers, which the Chinese learned to disassemble and move across difficult terrain on pack animals. FATC by December 1943 had graduated 1,200 Chinese officers and enlisted men and retrained the artillery battalions of the 2nd, 5th 6th, 71st, 53rd, and 54th Armies.¹⁵¹

ITC's basic mission taught tactical US military principles to Chinese officers at the company-grade level. General Thomas Arms—also a Fort Leavenworth graduate—was the senior ITC instructor. The infantry center offered five main courses that ranged from six to eight weeks: the infantry officers' course, the officers' communications course, the radio operators' course, the engineer course, and the medical and veterinary course. ITC by December 1943 had graduated 5,000 officers and enlisted men, including 720 radio operators and 600 medics.¹⁵²

Dorn in June 1943 modified the Y-Force program to increase the pace and scope of training. The advisers developed a new system of mobile army schools known as TIGs. Dorn established four TIGs and attached them to the 5th, 9th, 11th, and 20th Chinese Group Armies. Each TIG contained ten to 40 US advisers and primarily operated at the division and regimental levels. TIG training focused on weapons, tactics, communications, and maintenance.¹⁵³

The US advisers in May 1944 also opened a new Chinese Command and General Staff School in Kunming, known as the “Little Leavenworth” in China.¹⁵⁴ The program ranged from eight to 12 weeks with over eight hours of daily instruction six days a week. The size of each class averaged 100 students at the rank of major and above. Eleven US Army colonels led the instruction at the school, where Chinese troops received translated military manuals from Fort Leavenworth and Fort Benning. The instructors offered courses on “newer” concepts of warfare, including armor, airborne, and amphibious operations. In addition, the school hosted US Air Force advisers to stress the principles of joint doctrine, focusing on the air-ground battle and air-ground supply.¹⁵⁵ During the last few weeks of the program, the Chinese officers participated in three war games, or what the US advisers called “map maneuvers.” The games required the Chinese officers to “estimate the situation, make plans, and issue orders.”¹⁵⁶

Z-Force. Stilwell in October 1943 sent General Arms with nearly 180 US advisers to Kweilin, where they began building a training center like the one in Kunming. The advisers a month later opened the Kweilin Training Center, which provided infantry, artillery, medical, veterinary, and signal courses. The advisers also replicated the Y-Force TIG concept to reach Chinese units dispersed across east China. Yet Allied

infighting, the US strategy focus on bombing the Japanese home islands, and the Hump's logistical limitations reduced the amount of weaponry and other aid available to Z-Force.¹⁵⁷

Compounding that logistical problem, new Japanese war plans for 1944 brought the entire Z-Force program to a grinding halt. Japan in April 1944 launched the largest-ever ground offensive in its history against China, codenamed ICHIGO. The offensive deployed 500,000 troops, 100,000 horses, 1,500 artillery pieces, and nearly 800 tanks on a 900-mile line stretching from Honan Province in north China to the Indochina border (map five). The main objective of ICHIGO sought to destroy Chinese and US airfields in east China and open a land corridor from China to Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁸

The Japanese offensive advanced rapidly, forcing the US combat trainers into a military observation mode. The observers split into 16 teams primarily within the 4th and 9th Nationalist War Areas. Although the US observers provided some advice and assistance, they mostly watched the massive Japanese force annihilate the Chinese divisions in its path and roll toward Kweilin. The onslaught convinced the US government to close its consulate in Kweilin and the training center there, which the Chinese burned before abandoning.¹⁵⁹ ICHIGO achieved its immediate objectives and left all of east China in Japanese hands. According to official Japanese and Chinese war records, the offensive inflicted 310,00 Chinese casualties and left 73 of the 89 committed Chinese divisions “seriously damaged” or “completely destroyed.”¹⁶⁰

iii. The Results: Old Habits Die Hard

The Nationalist Army's cultural traits of endurance, residual warlordism, traditionalism, and political command philosophy reduced the effectiveness of the XYZ forces in training and in battle.

Endurance over Preservation. Although the X-Force and Y-Force programs achieved varying levels of success, the US instructors observed systemic problems within the Nationalist Army, particularly with its medical services and treatment of soldiers. In the US advisers' view, medical services were more or less nonexistent. The advisers often conducted a week or more of rest for the Chinese troops before training them. General Arms reported that 70 percent of Chinese students sent to ITC suffered from trachoma, scabies, colds, and intestinal disease. Ten students died of health-related issues during the first three weeks of ITC training.¹⁶¹ US advisers in Y-Force also reported that malnutrition among the Chinese units caused an "appallingly high percentage of sickness, death, and desertion."¹⁶² Unlike Ramgarh where the US fed and clothed the Chinese troops, the daily ration in Y-Force amounted to about four bowls of rice with some greens. The advisers opined that the Chinese soldiers marched and fought on rations that "would starve an American."¹⁶³ At the FATC, General Waters reported that an entire artillery battalion arrived "undernourished and badly in need of medical attention."¹⁶⁴

The army's recruitment and conscription policies left it swollen with poverty-stricken soldiers and peasants, who received little resources from the Nationalist Army. In 1943, for example, the army conscripted some 1.8 million men but nearly a third of those men died or deserted before they reached their units.¹⁶⁵ General Arms stated that the "impressment system which passed for conscription brought in only the sweepings of the villages."¹⁶⁶ FATC reported that the majority of the enlisted men "were illiterate and

could not take notes.”¹⁶⁷ One US adviser concluded, “If a [Chinese] soldier became ill and was unable to keep up with his column, he fell out and was left at the roadside to die. It was simpler to conscript a new recruit to take his place, than to attempt to cure him.”¹⁶⁸ A US military observer within Z-Force during one battle noted, “There was no such thing as a field hospital.”¹⁶⁹

The Nationalist Army also failed to take force preservation measures because top-level commanders viewed the soldiers as expendable. At Ramgarh, for example, General Lo and other Nationalist Army leaders did not observe any standards when transporting the 23,000 Chinese troops—their own soldiers—over the Hump, where cold weather at high altitudes caused frostbite and some deaths. General Lo remarked, “Put 50 in a plane naked. It’s only three hours.”¹⁷⁰ The commanders thought “it would be foolish to waste uniforms if the men were to be given new ones anyway.”¹⁷¹ Many of the troops who arrived in Ramgarh required immediate medical attention and weeks of rest before they received military training. Troops also marched hundreds of miles to reach their assigned units, usually with little food and medical care. The 53rd Field Artillery Division marched nearly 4,000 kilometers from Manchuria to the Y-Force center in Kunming.¹⁷²

Corrupt senior Chinese officers and government officials also wreaked havoc on the Nationalist Army’s troop supply system. Within Y-Force, for example, the Ministry of Communications controlled the Yunnan-Burma Highway Transport Association, enabling the minister to send commercial goods, including many illicit items, on military convoys to and from Burma. Military supplies were “thrown off” the convoys and replaced with commercial goods. Stilwell remarked that the US Army’s “presence here [in Yunnan] threatens to affect the enormous smuggling racket.”¹⁷³ Chinese logistics

officers also stole or hoarded supplies to sell them for profit. US advisers learned that the 11th Group Army's logistics officer stashed two million rounds of small-arms ammunition in his warehouse. In February 1944, Dorn in a letter to Stilwell's headquarters stated that the "entire Chinese maintenance system is utterly hopeless," labeling logistics officers as "incompetent, irresponsible, and mismanaged."¹⁷⁴

Residual Warlordism. As US advisers opened the Ramgarh and Kunming training grounds, the effects of residual warlordism surfaced almost immediately. In Yunnan Province, the Nationalist government balanced its authority with various local warlords, particularly Yunnan's warlord-governor Long Yun. Governor Yun's influence rivaled that of Chiang Kai-shek's central government. He operated his own army, printed his own currency, and ran vast smuggling networks for opium and other illicit goods.¹⁷⁵

Chiang Kai-shek since the warlord era had struggled to pacify local leaders in Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces—where the greatest numbers of militiamen and bandits operated. Chiang hesitated to send large numbers of government troops there because he feared Yun's clique would revolt against the government's military presence. That contributed to manpower shortfalls in Y-Force. As of March 1943, the authorized Y-Force strength totaled 412,600 troops but it only counted some 227,300 troops on the line.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, Yun's command of the 9th, 5th, and 1st Group Armies left General Cheng facing the Japanese in Burma without command authority over troops in his rear and reserve (appendix three).¹⁷⁷

Governor Yun also interfered with US Army efforts to secure buildings and land to train Y-Force. The only "buildings Governor Long Yun was willing to give the Americans were bomb damaged [...]."¹⁷⁸ When US advisers located the ideal compound

for artillery training, for example, the governor refused to remove his troops from the location. He instead suggested that the trainers move to his other compound, which the advisers described as “dirty, dilapidated, and bomb-scarred.”¹⁷⁹ Yun’s interference delayed the Y-Force training program for weeks.

At Ramgarh, senior Chinese officers assumed that the traditional warlord payment “practice” would remain in effect, in which advisers would distribute “a single blanket payment” to them directly.¹⁸⁰ While that practice benefited top-level Chinese officers who tapped the money before it reached the lower ranks, it also “reduced the Chinese Army to near impotence,” according to the US Army’s official history.¹⁸¹ As the highest-ranking officer at Ramgarh, General Lo demanded a lump sum of 450,000 rupees to pay the 22nd and 38th Divisions. He intended to divert at least 100,000 rupees for himself at the expense of the division commanders and troops.¹⁸² Stilwell in mid-1943 succeeded in removing General Lo from Ramgarh, but US advisers spent over a year working out a new payment system.¹⁸³

Like the warlord armies, many of the officers within X-Force and Y-Force also did not support their men or show a desire to build professional soldiers. In August 1943, Stilwell in a letter to the New First Army wrote that the officers neither cared for their men nor enforced their training correctly. Officers continued to focus on marching and parading and not tactics. Stilwell asked, “Of what use will the goose-step be in the jungles of Burma? The important things will be scouting, patrolling, concealment, and marksmanship [...]”¹⁸⁴

Stilwell demanded that the Chinese officer display three key qualities: a thorough understanding of military matters, the ability to share hardships with his men, and the

capacity to care for his men. Stilwell closed the letter by saying, “Ask yourselves if you are doing all these things. You know that in many cases you are not.”¹⁸⁵ A year after Stilwell’s letter, a US combat liaison officer attached to the New First Army reported that the majority of the Chinese officers lacked discipline and professionalism. The US officer also noted that the army paid no attention to maintenance or supply, stating that the “misuse and abuse of 1st Army vehicles [was] disgraceful.”¹⁸⁶ In Kweilin, the US observers with Z-Force came to the same conclusion that US Army Colonel Morrow and the Soviet advisers reported in the 1920s: “From the [Chinese] field officer on up, there is extreme doubt as to his professional ability.”¹⁸⁷

Many of the Chinese officers in Y-Force also did not care about unit cohesion or the conduct of their men. At FATC, the instructors planned a series of marches for Chinese artillery units, ranging from 70 to 90 miles and lasting 22 to 31 hours. During those marches, the officers stayed in the rear and did not supervise their men or animals.¹⁸⁸ One adviser noted that the senior officers “knew nothing of modern staff procedure” and lacked “theoretical and practical experience in modern warfare.”¹⁸⁹ Many of the officers also resisted US instruction because they feared that the Americans would uncover their corruption.¹⁹⁰

Traditionalism. While Ramgarh raised and equipped a new Chinese army, military liaison reports suggest that the Chinese officers did not embrace US training methods or combat philosophies. For example, one of the FATC’s main goals was to transfer the concept of “massed fires” to the Chinese artillery commanders. Waters and Dorn reported that they struggled to persuade those commanders “to mass the fire of even one battery. They [the Chinese] persisted in regarding the field piece as an individual

weapon to be used individually not collectively.” The advisers eventually dropped massed fires from the training.¹⁹¹

Many of the Chinese field-grade officers also ignored the advice offered by their subordinates, who received Y-Force training. For example, over 90 percent of the Chinese officers in the FATC’s first six classes were captains, first lieutenants, and second lieutenants.¹⁹² When those captains and lieutenants returned to their units, the field-grade and general officers disregarded their advice. The higher-ranking officers stuck to warlord-type tactics or World War I precepts based on old Soviet and German instruction. US advisers at the Command and General Staff School tried to alleviate the tension between higher and lower officers, but the Staff School only trained a small portion of China’s majors, colonels, and generals. The school remained in operation until late 1945, graduating 500 Chinese officers and lecturing about 100 officers from Chief of Staff General He Yingqin’s headquarters.¹⁹³

When tested in battle, X-Force and Y-Force showed hints of traditionalism that encumbered combat operations or greatly increased casualties. In October 1943, Stilwell launched his general offensive to retake north Burma as part of the larger Allied campaign in Southeast Asia. Stilwell’s offensive detailed a large pincer movement on two axes converging in north Burma, with X-Force advancing east from India while Y-Force moved west from Yunnan. The movement of X-Force, codenamed ALBACORE, detailed a three-phased operation to clear the Hukawng Valley, capture Myitkyina, and advance toward Katha and Bhamo (map six). The operation would reopen the ground line of communication to China.¹⁹⁴

The New First Army from October to December 1943 made its initial advances into the Hukawng Valley. Two crack regiments of the Japanese 18th Division quickly maneuvered and surrounded the Chinese units, which suffered heavy casualties in the opening moves of the battle. The offensive halted in mid-December around the village of Yupbang, where the Japanese overran the command post of the 112th Regiment, 38th Division and captured its chief US liaison officer. By late December, the 38th Division had counted nearly 40 officers and 707 enlisted men dead and wounded.¹⁹⁵ At that point, Stilwell blamed the failure on China's "centuries of military defensive traditions [...] instead of attacking and routing the Japanese, the Chinese stopped and dug in."¹⁹⁶

Like the German-trained Chinese units, the initial moves of ALBACORE showed a gap between what the US advisers taught and how the Chinese fought in battle. Stilwell in late December issued a five-page training memorandum in which he detailed the operational flaws of the Chinese units. He admitted, "Many of our men have died bravely, but not intelligently [...] our casualties were frequently heavy because our troops were reckless."¹⁹⁷ He continued, "reconnaissance was not done [...] enemy positions were attacked frontally [...] firing of all types of weapons was done wildly [...] reinforcements were committed in piecemeal fashion [...] sanitation has been almost completely neglected."¹⁹⁸ Stilwell also observed that Chinese troops wasted food, ammunition, and other supplies dropped by US aircraft, like the use of grenades for fishing.¹⁹⁹

With the offensive foundering, Stilwell in late December left his headquarters to take direct command of the New First Army in the field. From February to mid-May, the New First Army fighting alongside GALAHAD and two additional Chinese divisions

(the 14th and 50th) broke the stalemate in north Burma, advancing from the Hukawng Valley to the Myitkyina airfield. ALBACORE culminated during the assault on the town of Myitkyina, where a military siege developed with 3,000 Japanese troops holding the position for three months.²⁰⁰ Although X-Force fought and won several tactical victories during the advance, the five Chinese divisions on the whole achieved mixed results. The Chinese continued to mount “do-or-die” assaults on Japanese defenses. During the fighting at Myitkyina, for example, the commander of the 50th Division, Pan Yun-kun, organized a group of his men into the “Pan Yu-kun Death Squad.”²⁰¹ The direct cost of the Myitkyina siege to the Chinese totaled over 4,000 casualties.²⁰²

The Y-Force advance into Burma, codenamed RAINBOW, showed greater problems. The 11th and 20th Group Armies, comprising Y-Force’s new CEF led by Wei Lihuang, as of early May began their initial advance into Burma (appendix four). The plan outlined six separate thrusts across the Salween River to capture two immediate objectives: Tengchung and Lungling (map seven). On 10 and 11 May, four CEF armies totaling some 72,000 troops crossed the Salween River unopposed but quickly ran into Japanese defenses west of the River, where the enemy 56th Division counted 11,000 men formed into six regiments. Although outnumbered seven to one, the 56th Division by the end of June had brought the battle to a stalemate.²⁰³

Like the ALBACORE movement, the CEF’s advance over the Salween River exposed gaps in how the Chinese trained and how they fought in battle. Running against the US advisers’ plan to bypass enemy defenses, Chinese army commanders deliberately chose to reduce each enemy position. They employed their units in piecemeal frontal attacks against prepared Japanese positions, resulting in untold destruction to Chinese

formations.²⁰⁴ The lead US adviser to the Chinese 53rd Army recounted the fighting at Tatangzu Pass: “Teamwork in use of weapons and supporting fires and the use of cover were conspicuously lacking [...] most casualties resulted from attempts to walk or rather climb up through inter-locking bands of machine gun fire. As a demonstration of sheer bravery the attacks were magnificent but sickeningly wasteful.”²⁰⁵ A Japanese soldier in his war diary wrote, “Some of [the Chinese] threw down their rifles and fought us with swords and bayonets. We shot them with cannons at point blank range.”²⁰⁶

In addition to the infantry, a number of gaps emerged between what FATC taught and how Chinese artillerymen handled their guns in battle. Dorn in late June sent a training memorandum to US advisers outlining those gaps. He noted that despite training in observation the Chinese artillery commanders fired into the “blue haze” with no observation “of any kind.”²⁰⁷ US L-5 planes conducted the majority of spotting for the artillery fires. Dorn also commented, “Batteries are placed so far to the rear [...] resulting in inaccuracy and waste of ammunition.”²⁰⁸ He also underlined the poor maintenance of the material and care for the pack animals.²⁰⁹

From July to late October 1944, the CEF pressed through the mountain passes in a slow advance toward Tengchung and Lungling. In response, the Japanese Burma Area Army launched a counteroffensive against the CEF, codenamed DAN. Reinforcing its 56th Division with the 2nd Division and a regiment from the 49th Division from south Burma, the Japanese offered fierce resistance to the advancing Chinese units. As the campaign progressed and the Chinese commanders witnessed the futility of their strategies, they became somewhat more receptive to US advice. Yet they neglected many of the US training methods and preferred to use mass without maneuver.²¹⁰

During the battle for the mountain peaks of Sung Shan in July and August, for example, CEF commanders' faulty operational plans and unit infighting allowed the 1,200 Japanese troops defending the peaks to counterattack and retake positions in protracted seesaw battles. The CEF commanders also used the concept of *nian zuo fa* (the military law of collective responsibility) to force subordinates to charge Japanese positions, resulting in commanders relaying more on suicide missions than well-planned attacks. The 82nd Division, 8th Army assembled do-or-die squads and offered each soldier 10,000 Yuan for their services. The CEF after three months of battle captured Sung Shan, costing the Chinese 7,600 men dead, including 5,000 troops from the 8th Army.²¹¹

After the CEF captured Sung Shan in late August and Tengchung on 14 September, the Japanese Burma Area Army ordered its troops on the Salween front to reassemble in central Burma. Fighting on the Salween front continued through the fall with Japanese rear guard actions offering tenacious resistance. As the Salween Campaign reached its close, the CEF counted over 40,000 casualties, including 23,000 dead. That death toll would have climbed higher without US medics on scene. Mobile US field hospitals admitted over 13,000 wounded Chinese, losing only 5 percent of those soldiers in the hospitals.²¹² On the enemy side, the Japanese suffered some 11,500 casualties. The badly mauled CEF earned a pyrrhic victory.²¹³

The strategies and tactics of the Chinese divisions in Z-Force also showed that the commanders lacked a general strategy and relied on outdated combat methods. The lead US observer with the 62nd Army in July reported that the armies and group armies around Hengyang lacked coordination, which resulted in piecemeal attacks against the

enemy. The observer also noted that the US-trained artillery commanders kept their batteries in the rear and out of enemy range. The Chinese infantry troops marching with the artillery units posed more harm than help. The troops deserted when fired upon by the enemy and several troops resorted to “looting” and “attacking women” in the nearby villages.²¹⁴

While the US observers with the 24th Group Army listed a number of competent Chinese commanders, the group army on the whole showed great inefficiency in battle. The observers reported that the Chinese would “hole up” in defensive positions, enabling the Japanese to conduct a double envelopment and crush the position. Despite the Chinese acknowledgement of Japanese phone intercepting equipment, the 24th Group Army’s communications traveled on open phone lines tapped by the Japanese.²¹⁵ The observers also commented that the group army’s use of US-made 75mm howitzers was “tragically ineffective. Old story of using one gun with remainder kept back for safekeeping.”²¹⁶

Political Command Philosophy. The Nationalist Army’s political command philosophy reduced its capacity to confront ICHIGO and slowed its advance into north Burma. The commanders of the 4th and 9th War Areas—in the direct path of ICHIGO—did not receive sufficient weaponry because they stood on unfavorable political grounds with Chiang Kai-shek. General Chang Fa-kwei, who commanded the 4th War Area and led a division in Chiang’s Northern Expedition, opposed Chiang’s government and sought to establish a separatist movement in south China.²¹⁷ As a result, General Fa-kwei retained “little or no control of [the zone armies] due to his persona non grata status with Chungking [Chiang Kai-shek’s wartime capital].”²¹⁸

Commanding the 9th War Area, General Hsueh Yueh, who in 1936 offered to arrest Chiang Kai-shek and hand him over to the Communists, maintained a shaky alliance with Chiang's regime. During ICHIGO, the Generalissimo's representatives objected to US training and arming forces under General Hsueh Yueh, who joined General Fa-kwei, the Yunnan Governor Long Yun, and other army commanders in "contemplating revolt" against Chiang's regime.²¹⁹

Chiang Kai-shek also imposed direct control over field units. Chinese field commanders lacked operational flexibility and initiative because at every step they weighed the political repercussions of their actions. A review of actions by General Sun, General Liao, and other commanders during ALBACORE indicates that Chinese units on direct orders from Chiang Kai-shek advanced painfully slow, permitting the Japanese to withdraw to and reinforce Myitkyina. One US adviser received reports daily that General Liao was awaiting Chiang's permission to advance, resulting in the New First Army's tank group moving without infantry support and losing several tanks.²²⁰ After the fall of Hengyang during ICHIGO, one US observer reported, "Not even a platoon could be moved unless Chungking approved it."²²¹

Conclusion

From 1924 to 1948, Soviet, German, and US advisers assisted the Nationalist Army at different points in its history and under different strategic environments, but all of the advisers confronted similar challenges. The Nationalist Army's political command philosophy, its concept of quantitative superiority, its penchant for traditional strategies and tactics, its preference of endurance to preservation, and its residual warlordism stymied foreign advisers' efforts to improve the combat proficiency of the army.

The Nationalist Army brought those five defining traits onto the key battlefields of the Chinese Civil War, including Tsinan, Manchuria, and Huai-Hai, which contributed heavily to its final defeat. A prominent Nationalist General in mid-1947 declared that the Nationalist Army's "generals and [...] military culture were corrupt and hopeless."²²² Even Chiang Kai-shek admitted, the officers "picked up the lifestyle and mentality of warlords [...] they never seriously study military tactics and the [battlefield] situation."²²³ Chiang's last US adviser, General David Barr, shared those blunt assessments when in 1948 he declared, "no battle has been lost since my arrival due to lack of ammunition or equipment. Their [the Nationalists'] military debacles [...] can all be attributed to the world's worst leadership and many other moral destroying factors that lead to complete loss of will to fight."²²⁴

The Nationalist Army's defeat provides some valuable lessons for present-day foreign advisory missions.

- The size of a military and the quality of its arms mean little without a recruitment, education, and training system that builds an adaptive and innovative military culture—the "bedrock of military effectiveness."²²⁵
- Understanding the host-nation's military culture is more critical to the advisers' success than the types and numbers of weapons they bring with them.
- Advisers should "mind the gap," which represents the delta between how they train the host-nation military and how it fights on the battlefield.
- Advisers should also avoid "training in the vacuum," in which advisers train a military without addressing the political or economic problems within the host nation that affects its military culture.

China, 1929

Areas under direct KMT rule, 1929

Areas ruled by semi-autonomous major warlords or warlord coalitions

All unmarked territory either disputed or ruled by minor warlords

Map showing major cities, rivers, and neighboring regions (Mongolia, Korea, French Indo-China, Siam, Taiwan, etc.). Key areas under KMT rule are highlighted in black, including the Yangtze River valley and coastal regions. Other major warlord areas are labeled: FENG, YAN, LI & BAI, and ZHANG.

60

JAPANESE ADVANCE IN BURMA
20 January - 19 March 1942

--- FRONT LINE, 19 MARCH
[] JAPANESE UNITS

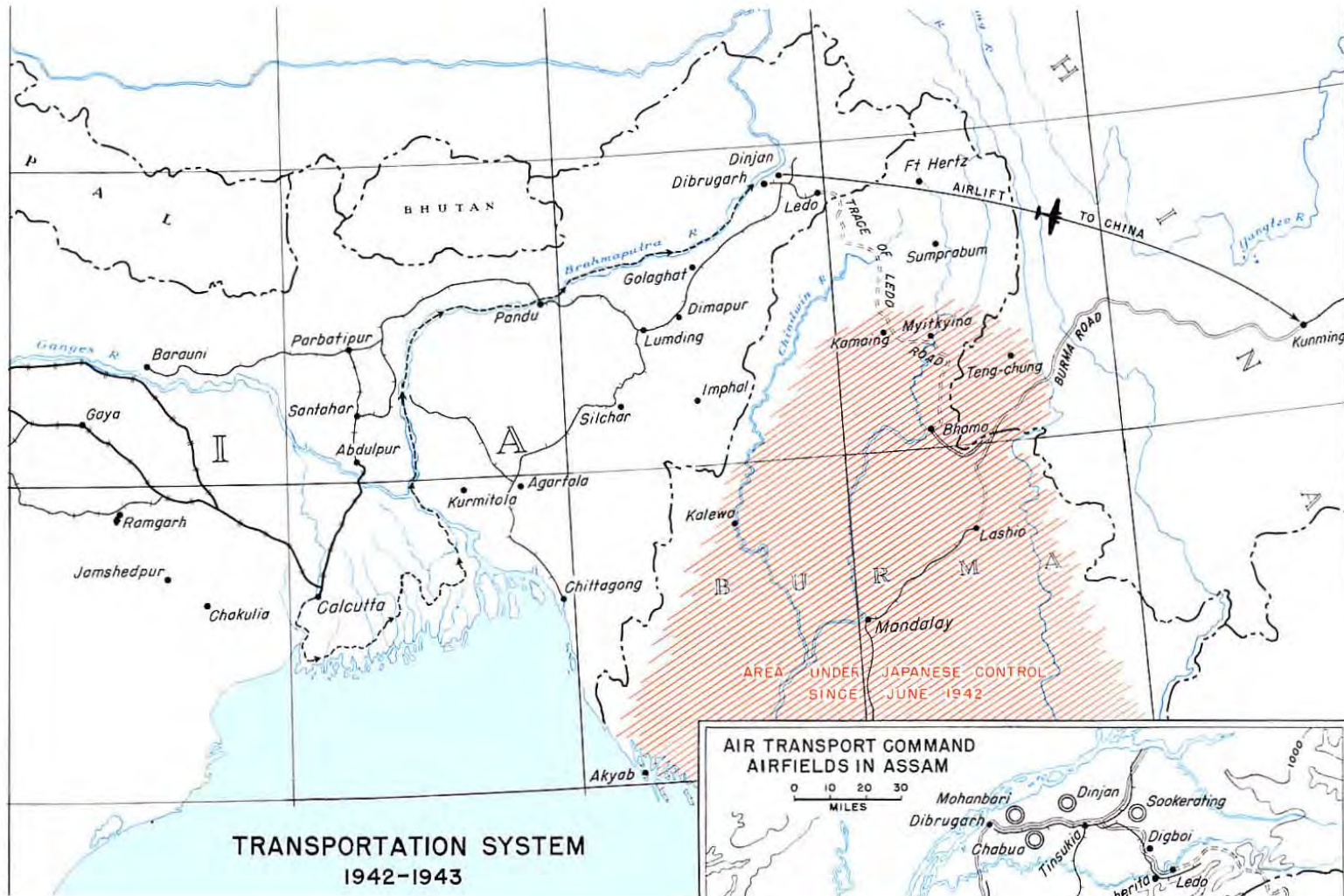
Allied troop dispositions as of 19 March

100 0 100
MILES

Map details: The map shows the Japanese advance from the north into Burma. Key locations marked include Lashio, Mandalay, Rangoon, and various rivers like the Chindwin and Salween. Japanese units are marked with 'XX' and numbers, including the Sixth Army and Fifth Army. Arrows indicate the direction of advance towards Rangoon. The map also shows the front line as of 19 March and Allied troop dispositions.

Sour

Map Three: The Japanese Blockade and the Hump



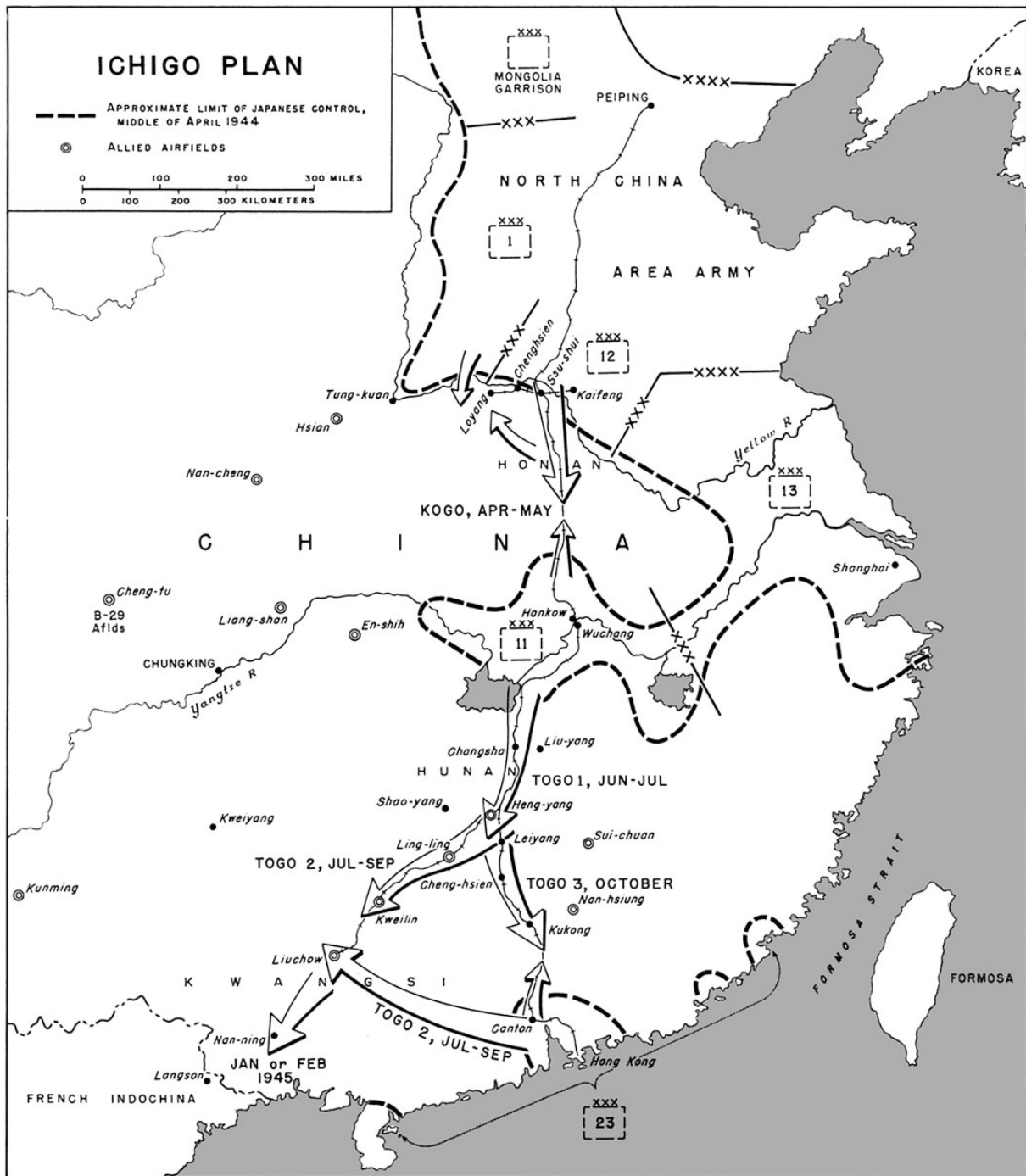
Source: Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), Back Cover.

Map Four: The XYZ Plan



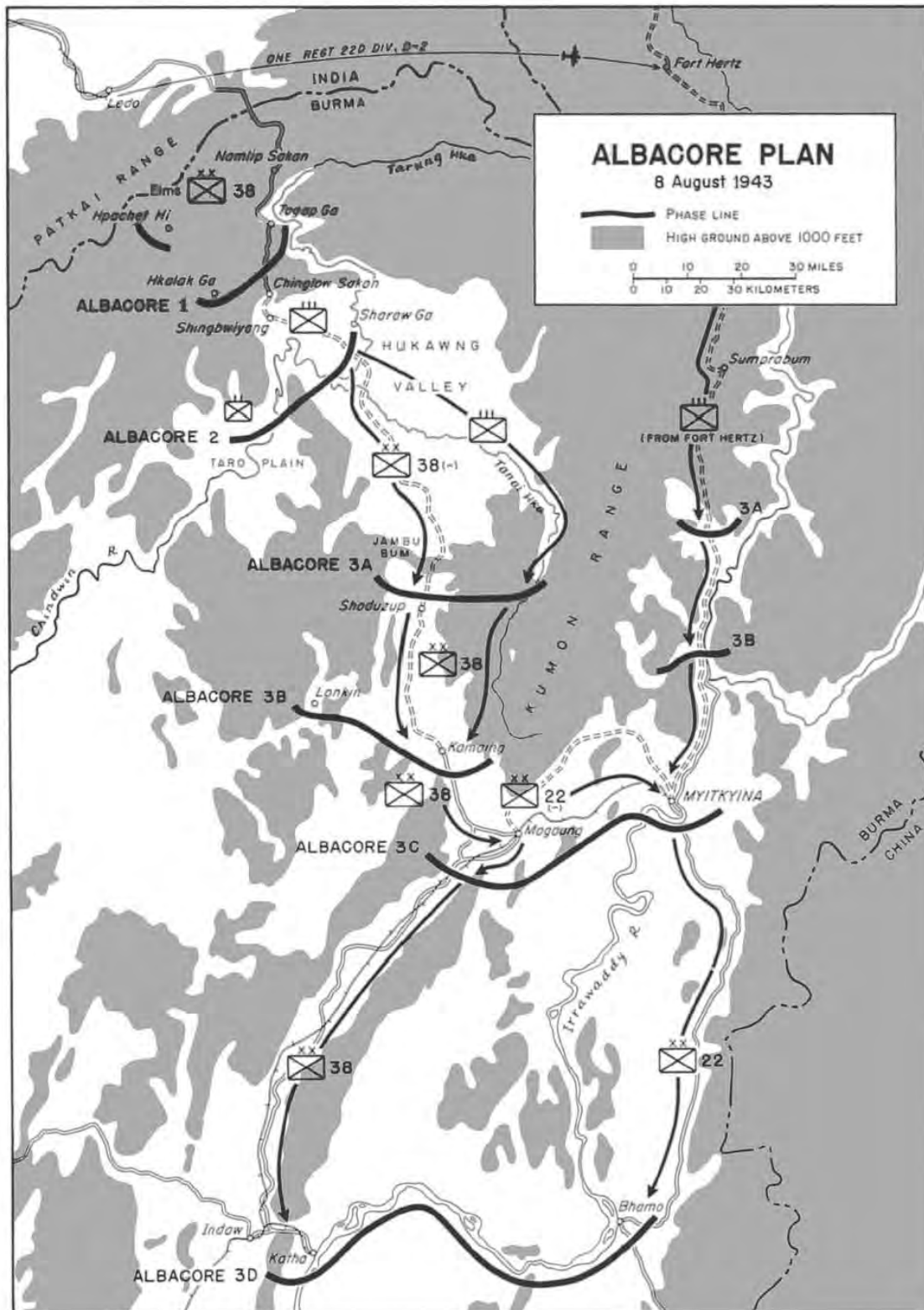
Source: Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 157.

Map Five: The ICHIGO Plan



Source: Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 8.

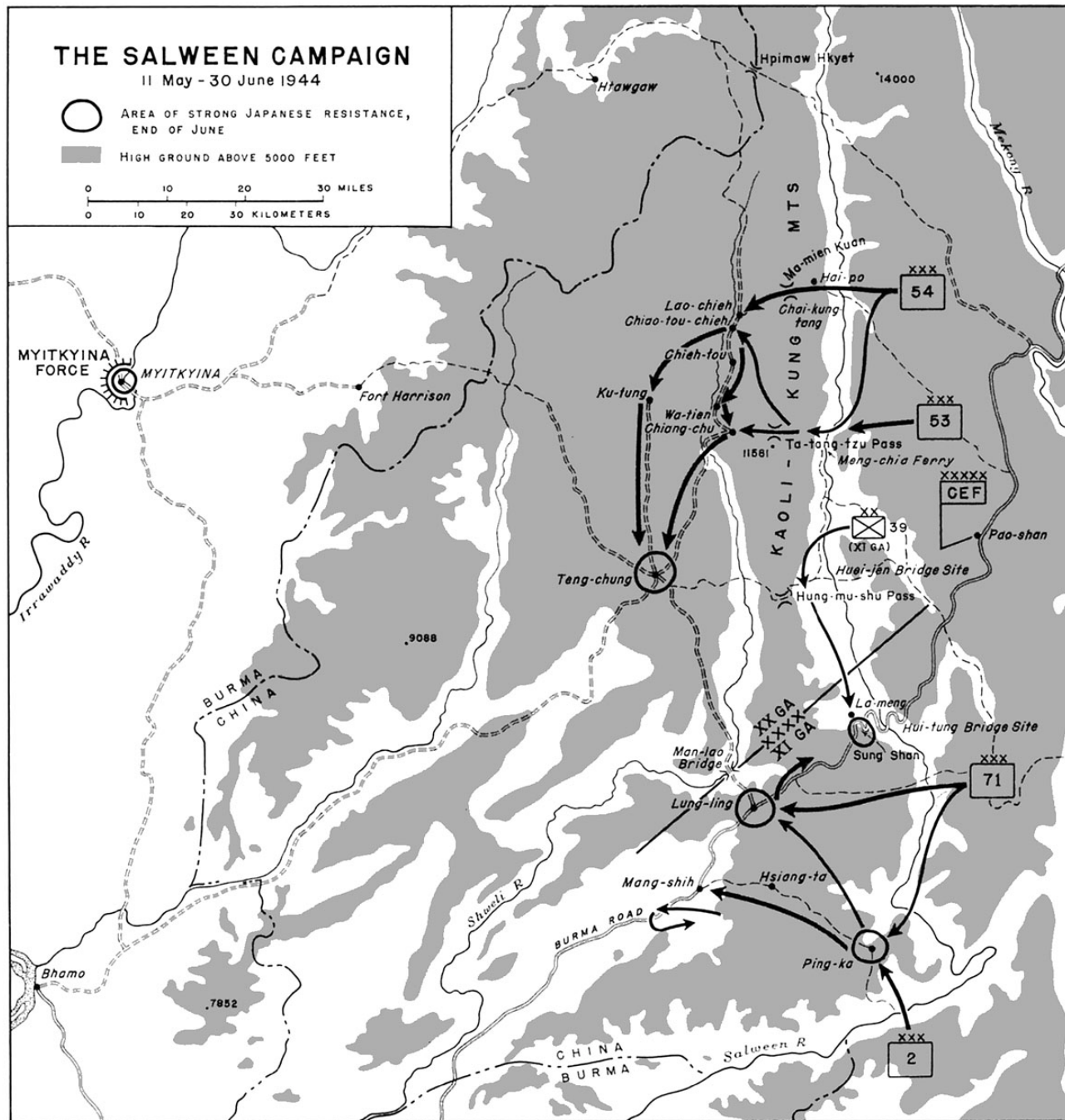
Map Six: The ALBACORE Plan



So

Source: Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 40.

Map Seven: The RAINBOW Plan



Source: Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 330.

Appendix One - Order of Battle: The Chinese Expeditionary Force, 1942

Headquarters, Chinese Expeditionary Force

Commanding General (General Stilwell)

Chief of the Chinese General Staff Mission to Burma (Lt Gen Lin Wei)

Executive Officer to General Stilwell (Lt Gen Lo Cho-ying)

5th Army (Lt Gen Tu Yu-ming)

22nd Division (Maj Gen Liao Yao-shiang)

64th Regiment

65th Regiment

66th Regiment

96th Division (Maj Gen Yu Shao)

286th Regiment

287th Regiment

288th Regiment

200th Division (Maj Gen Tai Anlan)

598th Regiment

599th Regiment

600th Regiment

Training Depot

1st Reserve Regiment

2nd Reserve Regiment

Army Troops (attached)

Cavalry Regiment

Artillery Regiment

Engineer Regiment

Armored Regiment

Motor Regiment

Signal Battalion

6th Army (Lt Gen Kan Li-chu)

49th Division (Maj Gen Peng Pi-shen)

145th Regiment

146th Regiment

147th Regiment

55th Division (Lt Gen Chen Mien-wu)

1st Regiment

2nd Regiment

3rd Regiment

93rd Division (Lt Gen Lu Kuo Chuan)

277th Regiment

278th Regiment

279th Regiment

Army Troops (attached)

Engineer Regiment

Transport Regiment

Signal Battalion
1st Battalion, 13th Artillery Regiment
66th Army (Lt Gen Chang Chen)
28th Division (Maj Gen Liu Po-lung)
82nd Regiment
83rd Regiment
84th Regiment
38th Division (Lt Gen Sun Li-jen)
112th Regiment
113th Regiment
114th Regiment
29th Division (Maj Gen Ma Wei-chi)
85th Regiment
86th Regiment
87th Regiment
Army Troops (attached)
1st Battalion, 18th Artillery Regiment

Appendix Two - Order of Battle: X-Force, 1943-1944

Headquarters, Chinese Army in India (X-Force)

Commanding General (General Stilwell)
Deputy Commander (Lt Gen Lo Cho-ying)

New First Army (Lt Gen Cheng Tung-kuo)
22nd Division¹ (Lt Gen Liao Yao-hsiang)
64th Regiment
65th Regiment
66th Regiment
38th Division (Lt Gen Sun Li-jen)
112th Regiment
113th Regiment
114th Regiment
30th Division (Lt Gen Hu Su)
88th Regiment
89th Regiment
90th Regiment
14th Division² (Maj Gen Lung Tien-wu)
41st Regiment
42nd Regiment
50th Division³ (Maj Gen Li Tao, Lt Gen Yu Pan-kum)
149th Regiment

¹ The 22nd, 14th, and 50th Divisions in September 1944 formed into the New Sixth Army led by General Liao Yueh-shang.

² Attached to X-Force in April 1944.

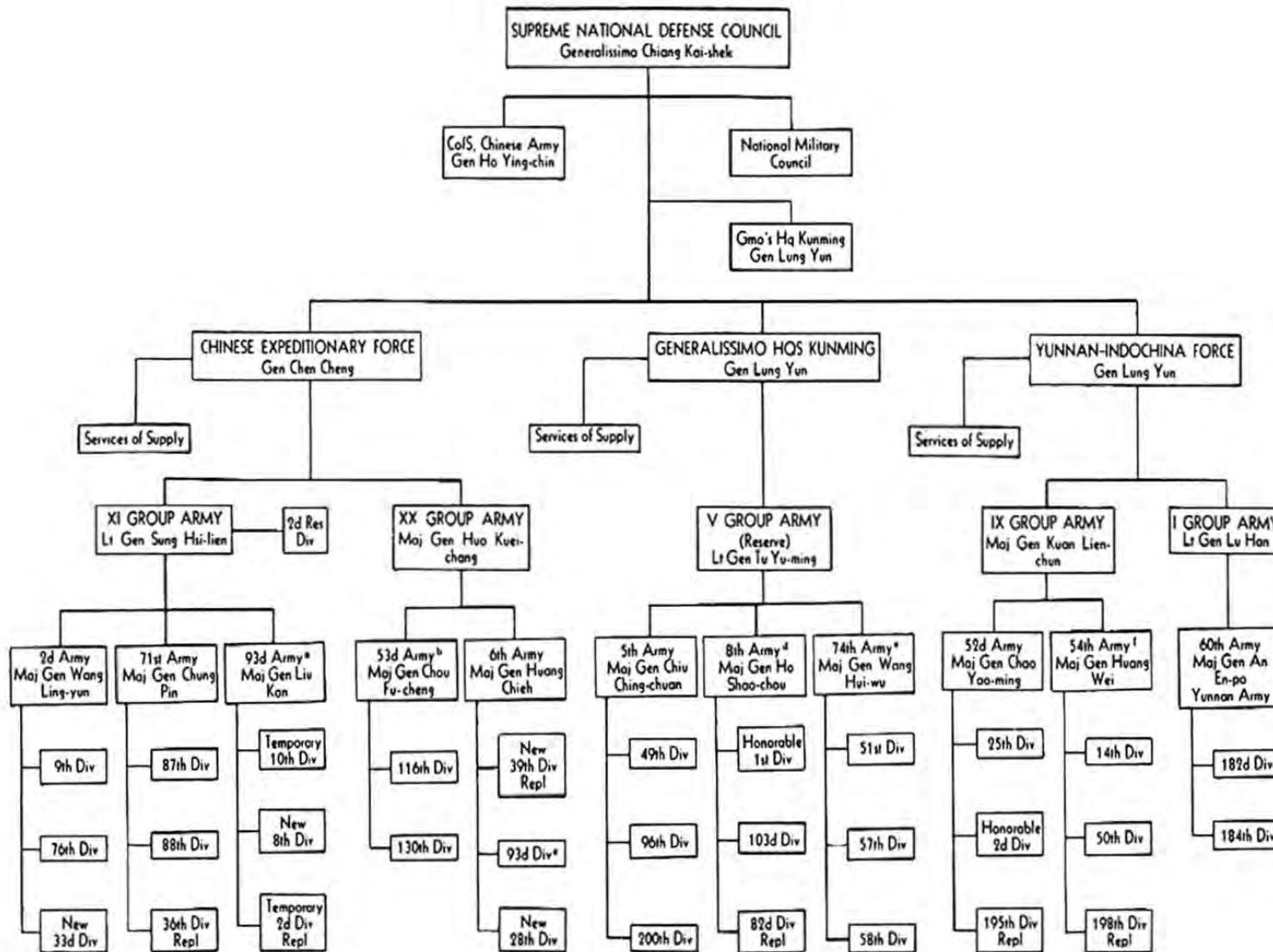
³ Attached to X-Force in April 1944.

150th Regiment
1st Chinese Provisional Tank Unit (Col Rothwell H. Brown)
6th Motor Transport Unit
12th Engineer Unit
Animal Transport Unit
1st Ordnance Battalion
3rd Signal Battalion
Anti-Aircraft Battalion
Military Police Battalion
Special Service Battalion
Transportation Battalion
Veterinarian Collecting Platoon
1st Field Hospital Provisional Medical Detachment 20th General Hospital
Provisional Medical Detachment 14th Evacuation Hospital
Provisional Medical Detachment 73rd Evacuation Hospital
Heavy Mortar Regiment
4th Field Artillery Regiment
5th Field Artillery Regiment
12th Field Artillery Regiment
1st Convalescent Hospital
2nd Administration Hospital Section
5th Administration Hospital Section
Medical Training Class

(US Army) 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional)
Commanding General (Brig Gen Frank D. Merrill)
Deputy Commander (Col Charles N. Hunter)

1st Battalion (Lt Col William L. Osborne)
 Red Combat Team
 White Combat Team
2nd Battalion (Lt Col George A. McGee, Jr.)
 Blue Combat Team
 Green Combat Team
3rd Battalion (Lt Col Charles E. Beech)
 Orange Combat Team
 Khaki Combat Team

Appendix Three - Order of Battle: Y-Force, 1943-1944



Source: Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II, China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1987), 297.

Appendix Four - Order of Battle: The Chinese Expeditionary Force, 1944

Headquarters, Chinese Expeditionary Force

Commanding General (General Wei Lihuang)

Chief of Staff (Hsiao I-hsu)

20th Group Army (General Huo Kuei-chang)

53rd Army

116th Division

130th Division

54th Army

36th Division

198th Division

11th Group Army (General Sung Hsi-lien)

2nd Army

9th Division

New 33rd Division

76th Division

6th Army

Reserve 2nd Division

New 39th Division

76th Division

71st Army

New 28th Division

87th Division

88th Division

8th Army

Honorable 1st Division

82nd Division

103rd Division

200th Division

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